

AZIZ AL-AZMEH

The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity

Allāh and his People



CAMBRIDGE

THE EMERGENCE OF ISLAM IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Based on epigraphic and other material evidence as well as more traditional literary sources and critical review of the extensive relevant scholarship, this book presents a comprehensive and innovative reconstruction of the rise of Islam as a religion and imperial polity. It reassesses the development of the imperial monotheism of the New Rome, and considers the history of the Arabs as an integral part of Late Antiquity, including Arab ethnogenesis and the emergence of what was to become Muslim monotheism, comparable with the emergence of other monotheisms from polytheistic systems. Topics discussed include the emergence and development of the Muḥammadan polity and its new cultic deity and associated ritual, the constitution of the Muslim canon, and the development of early Islam as an imperial religion. Intended principally for scholars of Late Antiquity, Islamic studies and the history of religions, the book opens up many novel directions for future research.

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For Nadia

Bald heads forgetful of their sins.
Old, learned, respectable bald heads
Edit and annotate the lines
That young men, tossing on their beds,
Rhymed out in love's despair
To flatter beauty's ignorant ear.

....

Lord, what would they say,
Did their Catullus walk that way?

W. B. Yeats

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Preface

This book is an extended essay in historical interpretation. Its overarching theme is Islam *in* Late Antiquity, rather than the vaguer one of Islam *and* Late Antiquity. It is hoped that this unequivocal formulation will facilitate a reassessment of the wealth of source material and of scholarship on Late Antiquity and the emergence of Islam. In many ways, this material is ripe for synoptic and synthetic treatment, and for a fresh look at Muslim emergence which might bring together its various thematic and historical elements into an articulated analytical perspective, placed on a new footing.

Central to the theme of Islam in Late Antiquity is a deliberative perspective on Islamic emergence, an academic growth industry in recent decades that has hitherto been generally captive to older habits of thought which have disallowed it from coming to terms historically with the material at hand and the issues raised by it. To this purpose, the historiographic category of Paleo-Islam will be proposed and developed in the following chapters, as an aid to the convergent operations of periodisation and categorisation. Both are intended to facilitate regarding this foundational period as highly specific, captive neither to a retrojection of its later developments, nor to its restricted conditions of emergence, generally officiated as a search for the red herring of origins, often textual origins, a search which obscures both process and contingency.

It will emerge that this conjunction of historical categories, Late Antiquity and Islam, reveals that Paleo-Muslim religion and polity are thinkable only in terms of conditions and structures that mark the broader history of Late Antiquity. Central to this is the history of late antique Arabs, but in a manner that is determined entirely neither by origins nor by outcomes.

It is hoped thereby that a perspective on the emergence of Islam will be won without the all-too-common recourse by interpretation to contrastive histories of East and West, or the equally common presumption that Islam was somehow frozen in a perpetual moment of inception, or that it was, as a consequence, to be interpreted only in terms of its scriptural

or ethnological bearings, to which tropes might be added the ascribed character of a derivative phenomenon arising from what is so vaguely described as Judaeo-Christian. The category of Paleo-Islam is designed to denominate a historical category bounded in space and in time, with time accelerated and space rapidly dilated. It is meant to impart a specific historical dynamic to a historical emergence, impelled by both internal momentum and external conditions. The time is *c.* 600–750, and the space Arabia, Syria and farther afield. Nowhere will the end product be used to colour the interpretation of emergence, a process with no predetermined end inherent in its beginnings.

Crucial to the overall theme is the emergence of Allāh as the monotheistic deity of Paleo-Muslims, emblematic of the religion of Islam that developed and crystallised only in the fullness of time. Conventional wisdom, medieval as well as modern, has generally assumed that the emergence of Allāh was somehow self-explanatory, almost natural, and this book will propose theses at variance with this view. The historical theogony of Allāh, initially an exotic deity, it will be argued, needs to be sought in the structural possibilities of Arab polytheism, but also in terms of broader structures of polytheism which had themselves, under determinate political and social conditions, generated henotheistic and monotheistic deities in other times and places.

It will be seen that Allāh, initially a very specific deity emerging in a specific time and place, subject to conditions and possibilities obtaining there and then, was later to be recast and elaborated in terms of a universal regime of monotheistic divinity, convertible to Theos, Yahweh, Alāha, Deus, and the other names by which the monotheistic divinity is known. The interpretation of the emergence of Allāh will therefore utilise two distinct grids of interpretation used throughout this book, the one at once anthropological and polygenetic, the other minimally diffusionist. Otherwise, apart from alert eyes, an open mind and the curiosity of a naturalist, disentangling this historical theogony requires no special gifts. In all, the terms of reference need to be correlated to social and socio-political processes, like all theogonies which are collective representations of the sublime with conditions of emergence and consolidation that are ultimately worldly.

The turn taken by this deity from the conditions of west Arabian polytheism to universal monotheism was propelled by the development, ultimately the imperial development, of Muḥammad's Paleo-Muslim polity, inducted into the world of late antique empires, using the ways of that particular world. Empires had been abiding and commonplace systems of

large-scale power articulations, and the Arab empires were unexceptional in this regard. In other words, it will be seen that Paleo-Islam and its deity need to be regarded more as points of arrival, and less as generic beginnings. They did not arise from or act upon a *tabula rasa*, but brought to conclusion a constellation of long-term developments, Hellenistic and late antique, religious, social and political, but also ones that are specifically Arab. These last are imperfectly known, and an attempt has been made here to provide ethnological material sufficient for the purposes of interpreting the main themes addressed; in some discussions, little-known background material has been foregrounded for the sake of completeness and clarity.

What this perspective entails for historical research is the rescaling of a major event, the emergence of Paleo-Islam, and an expansion of the remit of its interpretation. Such a rescaling would take our central phenomenon into larger settings. These are chronological, geographical and conceptual, bringing a heightened understanding on a more general plane, broadening the scope of inquiry through comparisons and parallels, reclaiming matters submerged by the snares of history which, in their turn, ensnare unreflected habits and turns of scholarship.

This book starts from fairly broad thematic and temporal parameters, in broad strokes, which are then narrowed down gradually with an increasingly 'thick description' to a middle point where the emergence of Allāh is discussed, before broadening out again – to use a plastic metaphor, the thematic and chronological parameters of this book have the shape of an hour-glass. Thus, the discussion of the book's overall historiographic bearings ([chapter 1](#)) is followed by an interpretation of religious and imperial developments in the Hellenistic age and in Late Antiquity ([chapter 2](#)). The purpose is to disengage a number of interpretative themes, and a number of conceptual means for the analysis of relevant material, particularly the structures of polytheism, the development of monotheism, and the nexus of religion and political power, that will help in the reconstruction of Paleo-Muslim emergences, not least the consideration of the workings of cult at the points of concrete application, on the assumption that gods emerge from cults.

The book then narrows its focus as it goes on to describe Arab ethnogenesis in late antique times ([chapter 3](#)), in terms of both internal dynamics and possibilities, and of the impact of late antique empires upon the induction of the Arabs into the world of Late Antiquity, at the time when Barbarians on the western and northern fringes of the later Roman empire had charted their way out of the late antique system. The developments of polytheism, monolatry and henotheism, and what may arguably have been forms of

monotheistic faith among late antique Arabs (chapter 4), regarded in relation to the concrete social conditions of cultic worship, are then brought to constitute the background against which, and the means by which, the theogony of Allāh is discussed (chapter 5).

The temporal and geographical parameters of the book then start to widen again. The constitution of Paleo-Muslim polity and its internal and external consolidation, the workings of Muḥammad's extraordinary charisma and political adroitness, and the beginnings of what became the Arab empire of the Umayyads, are taken up in chapter 6, building upon historical and analytical materials sketched in the previous chapters. The terms of interpretation are attuned to internal dynamics, rather than the flowering of religious and social developments allegedly latent in west Arabia. One of these internal factors was the composition and canonisation of the Qur'ān, Paleo-Islam's most lasting legacy (chapter 7). Models for the interpretation of its composition, scripturalisation and canonisation are proposed in terms of its *Sitz im Leben*, the status of Muḥammad's vatic pronouncements and the nature of these pronouncements. Finally, a perspective is sketched, in the final chapter, designed to help model the continuities of the Paleo-Muslim Arab empire with earlier empires in place, and the beginnings of points of departure which were finally to crystallise in what one might recognise as Islam.

Clearly, a book such as this requires some familiarity with several bodies of specialist scholarship. It draws upon the classics, ancient history and historiography; on Late Antiquity scholarship and Islamic Studies, as well as on epigraphy, archaeology, historical linguistics, anthropology and the comparative history of religion. Some sites with archaeological and epigraphic remains relevant to this study are indicated on Map 1. All of these disciplines are internally differentiated, bearing differences of style, emphasis and interpretative direction. Many are developing rapidly, with scholarship being produced at a very rapid pace, and an attempt has been made to integrate or at least recognise some recent developments and results which emerged as this book was being completed, in a number of areas. Decisions, including decisions of strategic implications for the analyses and arguments of this book, have needed to be made with regard to controversial points, based upon judgements of merit and relevance. In many cases and where necessary, scholarship has been discussed, mainly in footnotes, in its historical contexts, on the assumption that scholarship, and the technical apparatus of scholarship with its attendant questions of interpretation, has a history and various webs of connections with its historical conditions of emergence. Above all, care has been taken with

the precise use of terms and expressions, especially terms and expressions widely used.

Further, this book has no specific disciplinary loyalties, neither does it share the parochial preoccupations, the institutional horizons or the in-group habitus of any specific discipline, except for that of the historical sciences, broadly conceived, as they developed over the past half-century. In institutional terms, it is a contribution to the history of Late Antiquity, to the history of religions, and of course to Arab history and Islamic Studies.

With regard to this last field of scholarship, and to the philological and historical templates it utilises, this book will be seen to break some standard moulds and to contain a number of significant departures from the framing of research questions and the identification of thematic relevance that are habitually taken for paradigmatically normal. The technical and interpretative preoccupations of nineteenth-century philological and positivist scholarship, canonised most explicitly in Germany, still weigh heavily upon scholarship on Islam, with little headway made, until very recently, by the overall development of the historical and social sciences. This is reflected by its relative institutional and paradigmatic isolation, taking over little from more developed fields of study, and conveying little of more general relevance to the framing of broader questions of religion and of history. It is hoped that this book will bring a measure of self-reflexivity in historical research into the fields and themes treated, and contribute to making up for the relative lack thereof that often marks the work of those cognitive institutions that we term disciplines.

Studies of the emergence of Islam and Qur'ānic studies have been a substantial growth area in recent decades, with mixed results. These mixed results are largely due to the deflection of research into the facile excitements of hypercriticism, a mood that has been incorporated into wider fields of historical scholarship, as if in distancing confirmation of the exotic character of the theme and of the field more generally. Although I am generally given to scepticism by temperament, and to scepticism over Arabic literary sources specifically by inclination, yet, having looked at the material and the arguments closely, I have considered it necessary to write a companion to this book, in order to put these matters in workable perspective, listed in the Bibliography and abbreviated as *ALS* throughout.

For all their limitations, the use of Arabic narrative and other literary sources, interpreted in terms of what the developments of the historical craft since the nineteenth century allow technically and conceptually, will yield the possibility of putting new questions to well-known or recently established *realia*, now reinforced by epigraphic, archaeological,

comparative and other materials which, among other things, help with filling in gaps in the sources by inference. In this way, it is hoped that both questions and results will emerge, many at variance with the disciplinary koine. It will not be odd that some of the questions posed have been left unanswered, or answered only by way of general orientations and pointers; but, clearly, an answer is only as good as the question posed. It is hoped that the results emerging from this book may open new thematic research areas, encourage the framing of new questions, and ultimately produce paradigmatic shifts in the themes treated that will disallow spurious research questions and questions that are no longer relevant to the historical sciences.

It is also hoped that matters emerging from this book might make the history of Islam seem less alien and self-enclosed, and both more relevant and more interesting to historical scholarship overall than is usually conceded. Needless to say, the self-enclosure and prodigious singularity often attributed to Paleo-Islam and Islam in general are a reflection less of history than of the self-enclosed institutional habitus that cultivates its study but which, like other institutional habits, is not given eagerly to self-reflection.

This book is based on a fairly large amount of empirical material and interpretative scholarship, deriving from a variety of fields and a multiplicity of types of sources. I have used Arabic narrative sources extensively, selectively and without exhaustive coverage. There is some empirical material newly discovered, or newly drawn into perspective, emerging in this book, and I have used the considerable resources of a variety of disciplines, sometimes synoptically. Some material used is very well known and widely circulated, and has been given new interpretative twists and directions; material long available has been used in ways that are unfamiliar, such as the use of epigraphic evidence in reconstructing Allāh's historical theogony. In all, I have relied on scholarship that I deemed reliable and convincing, and opted for detailed empirical investigation where I considered available scholarship to be wanting.

Overall, in this interpretative essay, the balance of narrative and of detail, sometimes granular in scale, has been geared to the purposes of the analytical argument. Given the difficulty and patchiness of the source material, particularly that relating to Arab polytheism, the theogony of Allāh and the history of the Qur'ān, comparative material needed to be used for reconstruction, and room needed to be made, of course, for the use of the tempered imagination, however much dreaded by some colleagues.

In many cases, inferences, including inferences of a forensic nature, needed to be made from telling details, and from the physical qualities of material available, such as the linguistic nature of the theonym Allāh, the orthographic and architectonic characteristics of the Qur'ān and its earliest codicological remains, its physical form. Properly considered in analytical context, fragments in this and other contexts can suggest the full range of the structure in which they are embedded, and certain problems with the credibility of source material might be viewed from the perspective of consistency with the overall picture. Thus, in some parts of this book, the description of specific settings, and the narrative of specific groups of events, might be seen to be pointillist rather than comprehensive; yet no concession is made anywhere to the rounding up of matters, and an accent has been placed upon complexity rather than on the summariness of conception.

This is a very large book, and its composition has been a long haul. Readers will doubtless think reading it will be a long haul, too. I was faced with the choice either of writing a multi-volume work, given the scale of material and the range of themes, or of offering a long essay in the hope that other lifetimes might be spent well in pursuing a variety of themes emerging. I have chosen the latter path in the hope of offering the reader some reward for the effort of extended reading, and for the alacrity of disagreement.

Of technical matters, only a few points need to be made. The Bibliography lists all works cited. Footnotes cite abbreviations or an abbreviated title following the author's name. The Qur'ān, the Bible and classical authors are quoted in standard ways. Transliteration and standard epigraphic and phonetic notation, it is hoped, will be readily evident to the specialist, and not appear too distracting to others. Dates are generally given according to the Common Era (BC/AD), except in the case of the early decades of the Hijra (AH), where an indication of small-scale chronology, wherever ascertainable, is useful to highlight scale, and for indicating relative chronologies when others are not ascertainable.

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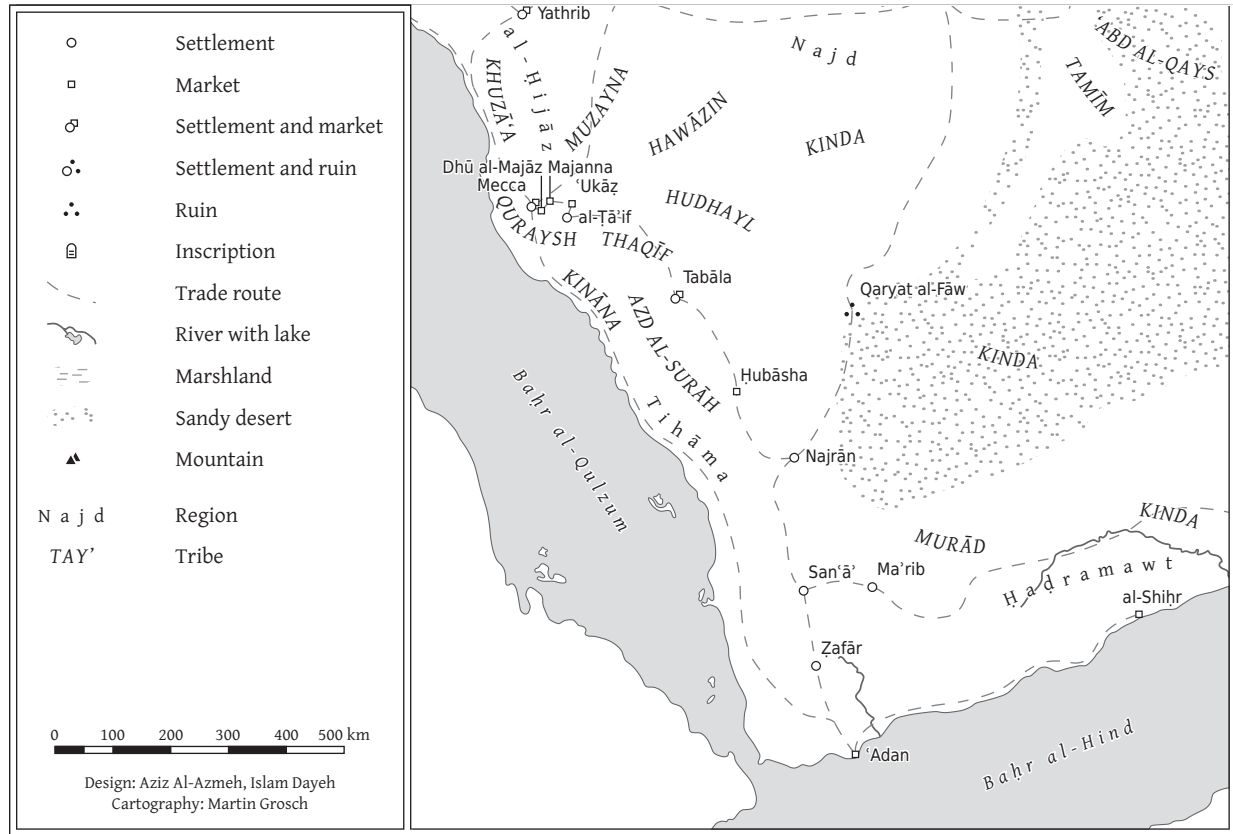
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Nadia al-Bagdadi is a lover of reading, and a guileful connoisseur of its arts, with a keen eye for such books that might be tasted, such that might be swallowed, and those few that are to be chewed and digested. With humbling thoroughness, she has read almost every word of this book before I would judge it fit to pass on to the Press. Her sympathetic reading made the book better, and her adversarial reading made it clearer.





Map 1 Territories of the Arabs, c. 600

CHAPTER I

Late Antiquity and Islam *Historiography and history*

The purpose of this chapter is to set out the overarching historiographic parameters for the discussions to follow, and to draw a line connecting the various component chapters of this book. It aims to discuss salient elements of the scholarly context that led to the framing of the questions asked and for the constitution of the objects of research pursued. This book sustains the simple thesis that Islam emerged in a specific time and place, in the wake of the Byzantine–Sasanian wars and the subsequent breakdown of the southern *limes* of both empires, areas that had for two centuries been particularly susceptible to the resonances of events further north. The time at issue is a period that has come to be known as Late Antiquity, a period whose purchase extended beyond empires and beyond periodisation based upon imperial history alone. The place is at once the central node of the late antique system, the region of the east Mediterranean where late antique empires and imperial cultures flourished, and its extension into one of Late Antiquity's marginal, *ultra-limes* zones, this being the pagan reservation of western Arabia that, with its paganism, represented an older form of continuity with Antiquity.

Neither Islam nor Late Antiquity constitutes by itself a topic of historical investigation. Each will need to have its parameters specified in terms of both time and place, and their various relationships of continuity, disjunction, inflection and refraction need to be deliberately investigated. Both Islam and Late Antiquity are macro-historical categories that require deliberate attention as to their internal constitution and articulations, their temporal termini and their historical-geographical locations.

Scholarship on Late Antiquity has already sought to develop specifications regarding the mutations following Hellenistic and Latin Roman times, reacting to views which tend implicitly to regard this long period of time as either vacuous and inchoate, signalled by a loose use of the term 'transition', or else of the degeneration of classicism. This body of scholarship has also attempted, in a variety of ways, to relate Islam to newer

definitions of the late antique period. The scholarly context therefore appears to be promising, and somewhat ripe for a serviceable stock-taking and consideration both synthetic and analytical. This may offer the possibility that Late Antiquity might be used as an explanatory grid that would account for the conditions that made possible the emergence of Islam, an emergence for which a fiercely singular aspect is often claimed.

The setting of Late Antiquity

Two issues arise immediately as one seeks to specify the parameters of both Late Antiquity and Islam, as they must arise in all macro-historical characterisations and denominations: categorisation and periodisation. The former, categorisation, requires considerations of internal morphology. The latter involves investigations of continuities and discontinuities: continuities and discontinuities not of some cultural or other essence constituting the morphology of the category in question, nor of overlying lines of genealogical filiation which are seen to assure continuities of essence. Rather, one would need to look at historical legacies as offering a repertoire of social, political, cultural and other possibilities, which might develop into different permutations and combinations of elements in place. In other words, it will be argued that what was to become Islamic civilisation was in effect the regional civilisation of western Asia: not the cause or consequence of the late antique period, but its most successful crystallisation,¹ with late antique empires providing the conditions for both its emergence and its initial crystallisation. Consequently, emphasis will be laid less on the far-fetched but persistent predisposition to interpret late antique Arabs and their religions in terms of the pre-Hellenistic, the so-called pan-Babylonian and, by extension, allegedly the proto-Semitic condition (in relation to which the contemporary witness of desert Arabs might be seen in terms of degeneration),² when not seen entirely in terms of a uniqueness signalled by an exotic religion.

It will be argued in what follows that Islam forms an integral part of Late Antiquity in the sense that it instantiated, under the signature of a new universal calendar, two salient features which overdetermine – rather

¹ Morony, *Iraq*, 526.

² On which Albright, 'Islam', 284 ff. Pan-Babylonianism was the name given to caricature the very widespread trend to interpret Oriental religions, and monotheistic religions by association, with reference to a primeval originality ascribed to Mesopotamian religion, and is one that will be encountered later. See Rogerson, *Anthropology*, 29 ff., and Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 227 ff., 236 ff.

than constitute the 'essence' of – this period. These are monotheism and oecumenical empire, the conjunction of which, in constituting the history of this period, serves in very complex ways as its points of articulation and internal coherence. Both monotheism (in senses to be discussed in the next chapter) and empire might be termed Roman, or perhaps Late Roman;³ the relatively sparse reference to the Sasanians in the discussions that follow is due to the simple fact that their legacy made itself felt meaningfully only after the period of concern to us here, and that, unlike Byzantium, the Sasanian empire was more of a tributary state that, albeit defining itself dynastically and politically, did not seem as consistently to consider cultural and religious universalism as constituent elements in its understanding of empire.⁴ Both monotheism and empire are taken in a sense that abstains from the altogether common reflex to regard Rome, or any such macro-historical category, as simply a figure of continuity with a classical past, or, in a wistful, stoical or passionate temper, to look at her history as one of decline and degeneration.⁵

It will also be argued that geography is crucial in this respect. Space needs to be weighted by time, in such a way that the spatial boundaries of the historical trajectory under consideration may be seen to dilate, contract or otherwise shift, as historical time works in concrete space. In this way, space will cease to be considered as a mere container and become

³ Bearing in mind that the adjective 'late' is not taken generally to be altogether complimentary (Bowersock, 'Vanishing paradigm', 33), and is used here for the convenience of general chronological indication. The same pejorative connotation applies to the French use of the term 'Bas-Empire' (Marrou, *Saint Augustin*, 664).

⁴ Cf. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 33, but see Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia*, 232–7, which might be seen to be an exaggeration if one noted Sasanian respect for local religions (Flusin, *Anastase*, 232–3, for Caesarea). Nevertheless, a schematic but not unconvincing case has been made for seventeen points of parallelism between the two empires: Morony, 'Should Sasanian Iran'. Recent research has suggested forcefully that the Sasanian empire should rather be regarded as a Sasanian–Parthian confederacy with considerable baronial control by the older Parthian nobility over vast territories in the north and north-eastern 'quarters' of Sasanian domains than as a centralised state. Further, moments of central religious control from the centre were evanescent, and the common model of a state-patronised and state-supported orthodoxy overseen by the Magi is compromised by the religious heterogeneity of Sasanian domains and the changing imperial tastes in matters of religion: Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall*, chs. 2 and 5, *passim*.

⁵ Cameron ('Absence,' 26, 29 f.) has highlighted with exceptional clarity the institutional academic reticence, sensibilities and preferences relating to Late Antiquity: it is used by Roman historians in terms of contrast to what came before, as post-Roman; if used with Constantine as its starting point it speaks well to Orthodox and eastern agendas; it begs the question of Roman historians as to whether Justinian was Roman or Byzantine; if extended into the eighth century or later, it may cause itself to be avoided 'because what comes later is Byzantium'. In all, choosing Late Antiquity over early Byzantium lays claim to both chronological and geographical space, as the period is, geographically, 'probably' Near Eastern or east Mediterranean, with the idea that the Arab conquests constituted a caesura now increasingly under the pressure of archaeological evidence to the contrary.

relational, as historical space. Thus, in speaking of late Romanity, stock needs to be taken of the fact that its institutions, broadly considered, and their spatial distribution, along with their centres (the capital, the imperial residences,⁶ the sources of wealth and of cultural production, relevant population groups), were in a very real sense translated spatially as its centre of gravity shifted, thus involving the translocation, over time, of a historical category. One is thereby able to give determinate sense to the incongruity of regarding, for example, Greece as part of the Occident, and Morocco as part of the Orient.⁷

For indeed, it is the case that geographical metaphors of East and West, directly or indirectly, have played an oddly determinant role in the delimitations of Antiquity and Late Antiquity. These, bearers of mutual 'otherness', bear within themselves connotations that impede rather than aid the understanding, and famously muddied attempts at understanding Byzantium,⁸ let alone Islam. It will be seen in what follows that Islam is the end product of the translation of Romanity to the East, considered quite simply as a cardinal point unburdened of culturalist connotations, and that it is within the structures of Romanity that Islam, as it eventually evolved by a process described in this book, found its conditions of possibility: œcumenical empire with the salvific vocation of a monotheist religion, the two articulated symbolically by political theology and a theology of history. The system was underwritten by an œcumenical currency and urbanism, the whole package now expressed under a new signature and in a different language. In all, it will be suggested that Late Antiquity might benefit from considerations that would reinstate its Romanity, considered as a comprehensive imperial system,⁹ as this would restrain the culturalist, classicist interpretative drift written into the 'antiquity' component of this general title.

To this historical trajectory, and in the terms suggested, categories of Orient and Occident, of Europe and Asia, will be seen to matter little. The overall thrust of these classificatory categories seems generally to be of

⁶ It is notable that only one emperor resided in Rome after AD 300 – Maxentius, from 306 to 312 (Mitchell, *Later Roman Empire*, 309).

⁷ One may note a rather distorted perspective on the internal economy of spatial relations, including centrality, from modern cartography based on the projection of Mercator and its later developments: Hodgson, *Venture*, 1.55 f.

⁸ McCormick, 'Byzantium', 2.

⁹ There is much work on empires. It will suffice here to recall a number of salient features of such durable, large-scale political systems: limited differentiation of political goals across large territories, the relative autonomy of goals centrally set, control and deployment of free-floating resources, a dialectic of social and cultural congruence and incongruence across space, elite circulation over time, and administrative institutionalisation. See Eisenstadt, *Political Systems*, ch. 1 and *passim*.

figuring homeostatic continuities within, and disjunctive relations without. One might add that the frontiers and cardinal locations of Barbarians shifted over time. Nevertheless, Europe is generally used as a rhetorical figure, a historical synecdoche in which part and whole stand for one another, despite shifts which overcame territories involved in myriad oppositions between ethnic denominations that changed over time.¹⁰ It may well be remembered that Europe was a term originally used for navigational orientation in the Aegean, and did not correspond to the east/west division arising from political conflicts,¹¹ nor to their use by the Roman imperial state as administrative terms.¹²

Mutation, decadence and religion

Delivering his inaugural lecture at Strasburg in 1862, Fustel de Coulanges reproved the habit of classical scholarship of talking of ancient Greeks and Romans as if they were contemporary Englishmen and Frenchmen.¹³ It was indeed in terms of diminishing mimetic ability and decreasing 'quant[a] of antiquity',¹⁴ understood as cultural goods, that, like much else, the history of what would now be termed late antique art – including Byzantine – was conceived. These were quanta remaindered in a process of decline, with some anticipations of medieval art, and in both cases bereft of inner structure.¹⁵ It was in fact in the context of fin-de-siècle Austrian art history that the first attempts were made to disengage, by formal and stylistic analyses, specific features that characterised an art then called late Roman, *spätromisch* and *spätantik*, without presuming decadence of decay or a standard ahistorical canon of beauty.¹⁶ Late Antiquity as a historical period

¹⁰ Burke, 'Did Europe exist', 22 ff.; Fischer, *Oriens–Occidens*, 26 ff. Similar shifts can be seen in Eran/Aneran (on which now Fowden, *Before and after Muhammad*, 2.11 ff.) and Dār al-Islām/Dār al-Ḥarb.

¹¹ Hay, *Europe*, 2 ff. It might be added that Aristotle (*Politics*, 1327b) thought of the Greeks not as Europeans, but as having occupied a median position between Europe and Asia.

¹² Fischer, *Oriens–Occidens*, 12, 23. ¹³ Fustel de Coulanges, 'Ethos', 183, 187.

¹⁴ Kazhdan and Cutler, 'Continuity', 455.

¹⁵ Kazhdan and Cutler, 'Continuity', 432 f.; Elsner, 'Late antique art', 275.

¹⁶ Demandt, *Fall Roms*, 170 ff.; Elsner, 'Late antique art', 276 f.; Hübinger, *Spätantike*, 22. It is Alois Riegl who is generally credited with this shift, introducing a formalistic vocabulary still current in art history: symmetry, frontality, rigidity, opticality, symbolism, and non-representational perspectives anticipating expressionism. In this sense he discovered Late Antiquity, without using the term consistently or terminologically (Fowden, *Before and after Muhammad*, 2.13, 14). At the same time, Josef Strzygowski worked more comprehensively towards decentering the classicising aesthetic presumptions in the study of late antique art, although this very wide-ranging work on late antique art was cast in the mode of degeneration and decline. It was he who coined the term late antique art in a work published in 1901 under the title *Orient oder Rom? Beiträge zur Geschichte der spätantiken*

and as understood today is, in its turn, the product of the latter part of the century recently past,¹⁷ and is largely but not exclusively the product of what has been criticised as anglocentric scholarship.¹⁸

Reconsidering the question of decadence and decline was a primary signature of the emergent field of study termed Late Antiquity,¹⁹ now duly become an academic institution, albeit not yet a clear concept, as we shall see. There are evident problems with the classicising notion of history with which ideas of decline and decadence are correlative. It tends to vacate a long historical period of determinate content. In addition, there are conceptual problems relating to a romantic historiographic trope grounded in metaphorical thinking both organismic (with emphasis on classical robustness and integrity) and aesthetic (with emphasis on transhistorical value), tending to take metaphorical terms for actual historical processes.²⁰

Closely connected with this last point is the view that, to cast change and transformation primarily – and on occasion exclusively – in terms of debasement and adulteration implies the tendency to apprehend the period designated as decadent by measurement against a classical norm rather than in terms of a historical dynamic which might comprehend both. Pertinent examples are some older studies of Augustine, whose verbal artistry²¹ was adjudged baroque and ornamental, devoid of classical solidity. Notions

und frühchristlichen Kunst; but his reputation suffered much from his pan-Germanic sympathies: Elsner, 'Birth', 358 ff. 363, 370 f.; Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 387, 401, 403 ff.; Liebeschuetz, 'Birth', 255.

¹⁷ The first use of the term following its art-historical use is generally attributed to Gelzer's 'Altertumswissenschaft', published in 1927. Lietzmann ('Spätantike', *passim*) also used the term in the same year, and, though conceding the aptness of Riegl's art-historical analyses in detail, believed that he had missed the general picture of Orientalisation and decline. In this sense, the concept can comprehend Islamic art as well as Islam as a phenomenon highlighting the answer of the East to Hellenism. Something analogous and *avant la lettre* was already noted by Becker with regard to Spengler ('Spenglers', 266 f.), despite his judgement that Spengler was a 'Procrustes of history'. Finally, Marrou attributes the term to Reitzenstein, without giving a reference (I have not been able to locate the item quoted), and notes that Burckhardt had used the term in a purely chronological sense: Liebeschuetz, 'Birth', 258 n. 46, and 259 for a glimpse at German *Altertumswissenschaft* in relation to this). The first appearances of the term in English seem to date from 1945 and 1962 (James, 'Rise', 21).

¹⁸ Giardina, 'Esplosione', 167 n. 35. On the scholarship leading up to the making of Late Antiquity, see especially Vessey, 'Demise', Cameron, 'A. H. M. Jones', and the statements of the master practitioner and his colleagues in Brown *et al.*, 'World of Late Antiquity'. This point has been clearly and explicitly picked up by critics of Late Antiquity scholarship: Liebeschuetz, 'Late antiquity', 7 f. and *passim*.

¹⁹ See Demandt, *Fall Roms*, the theme being all the rage today (Ward-Perkins, 'Decline'). On the scholarship of the decline of Antiquity and its antecedents, Momigliano, 'Introduction', 2 ff.; on the 'dogged guerrilla warfare' against the melodramatic accounts of classical decline in the academe, see Brown, 'World of late antiquity', 11, and cf. Liebeschuetz, 'Birth', 258 f.

²⁰ Koselleck, *Niedergang*, 220 ff.; Starn, 'Historical decline', 8; al-Azmeh, *Times of History*, 5 ff.

²¹ Marrou, *Saint Augustin*, 663 f., 665, 670 ff.

of cultural degeneration also fall captive to a historiography of names that come to imply morphological stereotypes. Writing a history of names taken for cultural labels, to which characteristics are predicated, deploys a 'hyper-referential' concept of culture not only as a descriptive notion but as an explanatory grid; in this, time and place stand simply as markers, rather than elements of explanation.²² This is not an unusual procedure; it uses one or more foregrounded elements, often arbitrarily selected and described, as criteria for both the description and the explanation of a historical category,²³ thus vitiating the possibility of addressing the complexity of large-scale historical categories.²⁴ Ultimately and inevitably, this leads to conceiving historical change in terms of contamination, denaturation, miscegenation, and other conceptual implications of the organismic metaphor.²⁵

Questioning the notion of decline and decadence in discussions of Late Antiquity²⁶ yields considerations of a specific gravity and the particular historical lineaments of this period. These are what are primarily at issue here, notwithstanding the postmodernist temper which has been ascribed to late antique studies by both practitioners and critics.²⁷ Apart from this sunny, and sometimes maudlin postmodernist temper and the drifts associated with it normally, it is crucial to signal the two central consequences of ascribing to Late Antiquity a proper constitution in historical terms other

²² Cf. Heuß, 'Antike', 29, 33 f. ²³ Kuper, *Culture*, x–xi and *passim*; Mauss, 'Civilisations', 91 ff.

²⁴ Crisply described by Tainter (*Collapse of Complex Societies*, 41 and *passim*), who also proposes a way of looking at decline in terms of the marginal returns of systemic complexity (193 ff.). Cf. Mauss' characterisation of a civilisation as a 'hyper-social system of social systems' ('Civilisation', 89).

²⁵ Marrou (*Saint Augustin*, 690, 690–1 n. 3) described Spengler's 'pseudomorphs' as 'Gauche'. See Spengler, *Decline*, 2.189. Note that this same procedure prescribes criteria of relevance and irrelevance for the inclusion and exclusion of historical materials in scholarship. One might mention, quite at random, materials that help the understanding of the 'Greek miracle' in terms of commonalities with the broader Near East: Burkert, *Revolution*, 1 ff. and *passim*, and Astour, 'Greek names', 195.

²⁶ Bowersock, 'Vanishing paradigm', 33 ff., 42; Cameron, '"Long" late antiquity', 173.

²⁷ Practitioners (Cameron, '"Long" late antiquity') have invoked Edward Said and the 'strategies and techniques' of post-colonial studies, including multiculturalism, as well as postmodernist relativism and due recognition of 'the periphery' (Bowersock, 'Vanishing paradigm', 39 and 'Centrifugal forces', 20). For his part, Brown (*World*, 184, 86 ff., 103 ff., 109) characterised the 'greatest political achievement' of Late Antiquity as the transformation of 'the average provincial' into a 'citizen' of the empire, and saw the period as one which somehow empowered the demos by its adoption of a middlebrow culture, and indeed of a 'Cockney culture', encapsulated in the Holy Man; he regarded monasticism as the bridgehead which brought fringes of Antiquity (Syria and Egypt) into the culture and politics of the empire: cf. Vessey, 'Demise', 395 ff. and Ruggini, 'All'ombra'. These views have certain concordances with Momigliano, 'Introduction', 9, 11 ff., 15. Critics have made the point that these views are expressed in clichés (Athanassiadi, 'Antiquité tardive', 313 ff.; Liebeschuetz, 'Late antiquity', 6, 8), and have in their turn been accused of 'transparent nostalgia for the ideological historiography of an earlier era' (Bowersock, 'Centrifugal forces', 19). Indeed, one critic of Late Antiquity studies regrets the restraint of professional, disciplinary turf divisions occasioned by the inclusivist attitudes of Late Antiquity scholarship (Giardina, 'Esplosione', 164).

than those of degeneration. The one is precisely the move to what had long been taken for the 'periphery',²⁸ understood here not so much as a post-modernist or sub-alternist evocation of marginality, but as a re-conception and reclamation of what was historically central. This was characterised above as the geographical weighting of temporality – with emphasis on both transformation and relocation, as well as on the spatial specification of issues discussed. Broad historiographic strokes apart, such claims for atrophy and the disappearance of ancient learning are counter-factual: Late Antiquity, including Romanity, was not exclusively Graecophone, and recent work has shown very clearly and amply how ancient learning flourished energetically with high technical accomplishment in the medium of Syriac.²⁹ This was a full dress rehearsal of the much better known story of later Arabic learning, both representing full continuity with secular late antique learning, in different linguistic registers existing in territories largely overlapping with those of Late Antiquity. Clearly, a shift in perspective is in order.

The other is the revaluation of religion, the reassessment of the period in some general way as the Theopolis, to use Marrou's somewhat hyperbolic term, with an accent on culture, specifically religious culture,³⁰ one, moreover, not confined to Christianity, but pre-dating it in late Roman paganism.³¹ It will be noted that in this revaluation of religion a novel positive spin is put on one aspect of history that Gibbon, like later authors, declared to be retrograde and irrational,³² and that had been one of the views of the late antique period that prompted the scholarship under discussion here.³³ This strong emphasis on matters religious in late antique studies has been criticised for taking place at the expense of politics and

²⁸ Bowersock, 'Dissolution', 165 ff., 170 ff. The claim that contemporary Late Antiquity studies are, in addition, born of underlying concerns with European integration (James, 'Rise', 28 f.) is relevant to this argument.

²⁹ Tannous, *Syria*, 25 ff. and chs. 2 and 3, *passim*.

³⁰ Marrou, *Saint Augustin*, 694 ff., who, though deploring the possible interpretation of 'civilisation' as an equivalent to the German 'Kultur' and its dreaded connotations, nevertheless identifies the two conceptually, albeit implicitly: Vessey, 'Demise', 385.

³¹ See Marrou, *Décadence romaine*, 42 ff.

³² Cf. Liebeschuetz, 'Late antiquity', 3, 3 n. 10, who detects in this an affinity to postmodernism, and Ward-Perkins, *Fall of Rome*, 172. This point is recognised by Bowersock ('Vanishing paradigm', 43), and cf. Vessey, 'Demise', 392, who speaks of using Gibbon's tools without his prejudices. Of these 'prejudices', it is worth noting that, like many of his contemporaries, Gibbon offered a positive evaluation of Muḥammad and his religion – thought to be a humanist religion without much superstition or a clerisy – as a foil to Christianity and its church (Lewis, 'Gibbon', 98 f. and *passim*).

³³ Cf. Cameron, 'Redrawing the map', 266 ff. and Dodds, *Greeks*, 193, 253

institutions,³⁴ as a result of which Late Antiquity historians have 'taken over' the early history of Christianity from theologians and Patristic scholars.³⁵

Needless to say, this emphasis on a religion that not only was to become 'theopolitical', but also was profoundly internalised in the spirits and lives of ordinary people, with emphasis on self-grooming, on the creation of 'textual communities', indeed producing for one scholar a 'new axial age'.³⁶ Such a perspective encourages the possibility for the relative effacement of social history as its historical dynamics are reconfigured around religious developments, implicitly taken to constitute the new cultural signature of the period. Culture and society might thereby be brought together in such a way 'as to leave scarcely any daylight between them', both being regarded as aspects of religion.³⁷ This lack of distinction is generally characteristic of studies of Muslim history, conceptually homologous to classicising studies of cultures (the Greek, the Roman, the Arab, the Muslim), and inextricably connected to romantic and organismic views of history.³⁸

But such theocentric enthusiasm need not necessarily be made central, nor was it entirely an invention of what has come to be Late Antiquity, not least in its Christian or Christianising redactions. Scholars of Late Antiquity realise that religion, and 'ferocious self-grooming', were not confined to Christianity, but had also marked aspects of Late Roman paganism.³⁹ The growing salience of religion, in other words, needs to be regarded as the distinguishing feature of the later Roman empire, a state of 'extraordinary tenacity'.⁴⁰

If we consider Late Antiquity as a period when 'ancient traditions were being decanted',⁴¹ and if we were to read through this metaphor, charming or grim according to one's reading of it, then we shall be impelled to inquire into the end product of this process of decantation and its resulting consistency. We shall also need to look into how the later purchase of such

³⁴ Giardina, 'Esplosione', 164 and *passim*; Athanassiadi, 'Antiquité tardive', 319 ff., who also (313), like other critics, comments on the seductiveness of Peter Brown's style. The revaluation of religion is of course common today, and the mellifluous fascination with rustic superstition, and with the irrational generally, is part of the package.

³⁵ Cameron, 'Long late antiquity', 180 f., with a positive attitude. It is little wonder that Late Antiquity has found favour among many Byzantinists (see *ibid.*, 175).

³⁶ Stroumsa, *Sacrifice*, 24 ff., 29, 150 ff., 182.

³⁷ Vessey, 'Demise', 394, with reference to Peter Brown. Cameron (*Mediterranean*, 69 ff., 75) has warned in detail against simply regarding Late Antiquity as an 'age of spirituality'.

³⁸ Al-Azmeh, *Times of History*, 202 ff., 225 ff.

³⁹ For instance, Cameron, 'Redrawing the map', 266 ff.

⁴⁰ Cameron, *Mediterranean*, 197 ff. Mitchell (*Later Roman Empire*, 380) has shown how, despite debilitating wars and an extraordinary series of natural catastrophes, the imperial administration continued to function impressively through the second half of the sixth century.

⁴¹ Le Goff, *Purgatory*, 12.

residues as remained were sedimented, bearing in mind all the while that, in matters historical, the consequential application, without residue, of general categories of nomenclature and associated description is as facile as the deployment stereotypes. The ease with which 'ideal types' become stereotypes is well known.

Yet late antique scholarship has little explicit truck with this stereotypical patterning of the historical understanding, it being generally given to a certain descriptivism, sometimes of thick description. Yet its concern with religion as a structuring element during the period, in less subtle hands, could be seen as implicitly reinstating a substantivist element in its construction of a historical category. It is little wonder that Late Antiquity has been described as an elliptical formula artificially confected to mark a historical period requiring the filling of a chronological deficit.⁴²

Scholarship on Late Antiquity repudiates an understanding of the period as being merely transitional. Yet it remains in many important ways captive to its polemical beginnings, and uses as a defensive strategy, often obliquely, the notion of transition, yielding an understanding dependent for its constitution upon earlier classicism, 'antiquity',⁴³ the primary element qualified by lateness.⁴⁴ When unreflected, this notion remains captive to a literary and cultural understanding of antiquity of venerable scholarly vintage. Marrou noted this possible problem, but proposed that the solution needed to be normative, suggesting simply that a positive connotation of the term 'late' should be adopted and that this 'other antiquity' should, when regarded on its own, be characterised as a 'mutation'.⁴⁵ Late Antiquity, a period of metamorphosis, is in this perspective still antique, but 'irreducible' to Antiquity.⁴⁶ In other words, the situation does not appear to be substantively different from that prevailing in 1927 when Gelzer first put the term *Spätantike* into circulation, lamenting the fact that it was regarded merely as the end of Antiquity or the beginning of the Middle Ages.⁴⁷

So what is it precisely that was the subject of change and mutation, and what was it that might be considered to have constituted the *differentia* of Late Antiquity, thereby coming to constitute this period as an intelligible historical unit, apart from signalling the recognition of change unrelated

⁴² Athanassiadi, 'Antiquité tardive', 311, 314.

⁴³ This point is well brought out by Martin, 'Qu'est-ce que l'antiquité "tardive"?', 263 ff. See Clover and Humphreys, 'Towards a definition', in *Tradition* 3. In practical terms, one sees this indeterminacy institutionally translated into philological and epigraphic projects concerning late antique topics carried out in the usual manner of classical studies (Solignac, 'Rencontre').

⁴⁴ Cf. Heuß, 'Antike', 27. ⁴⁵ Marrou, *Décadence romaine*, 12 f.

⁴⁶ Martin, 'Qu'est-ce que l'antiquité "tardive"?', 265. ⁴⁷ Gelzer, 'Altertumswissenschaft', 173.

to contemporary aesthetic preferences? How are the temporal termini of Late Antiquity construed, irrespective of how rough the chronology must be in these circumstances? And, last but not least, precisely how do time and space relate in the perception of this historical period?

Clearly, a proper definition of the period cannot rest content with identifying the *differentia* without addressing the *genus*. And clearly, again, Late Antiquity would be incomplete, and would lend itself to incoherence and to a blurred definition, if one did not include in this definition the persistences that subtend its connection with Antiquity. On closer scrutiny, it would appear that the binding element of the two phases of Antiquity assumed in the definition, the classical and the late, would be seen to reside in the persistence, not of art and letters, although this is not in itself inconsiderable yet might easily drift towards the perception of decline, but rather of imperial Romanity with its Hellenistic culture, and its later linear extensions in Constantinople and Damascus. Identifying the binding element of a historical trajectory would clarify the general conditions under which changes took place; the invocation of Romanity has much systemic explanatory force and, when shorn of the temptation for denial, would emerge as the *sine qua non* for explaining the emergence of imperial systems with an œcumenical vocation, including the Caliphate.

Antiquity and Late Antiquity in space and time

By token of its very name, Late Antiquity appears to be a term that not only follows, but also preserves certain constituent elements of its earlier vintage. For some, it preserves the 'legacy' of Antiquity. After all, it is a late redaction of Antiquity by definition, preserving, among other things, Roman law and Christian institutions, quite apart from architectural and other elements,⁴⁸ to which might be added the persistence of *paideia*. Despite the political upheavals of the Antonine and Severan periods and of the Barbarian invasions in the West, the Roman state had been preserved as a legal entity, hence in continuity, until the establishment of the Lombard state in Italy, the dissolution of the *res publica* under Justinian and, later, the rise of Islam.⁴⁹ The model of late Romanity in circulation had generally highlighted continuities of the cultural order – hence 'antiquity'⁵⁰ – and resorted to external factors in accounting for change, most importantly the incursions of mainly Germanic external proletariats.⁵¹ To what extent this

⁴⁸ Marrou, *Décadence romaine*, 110 ff.

⁴⁹ Gelzer, 'Altertumswissenschaft', 12 f.

⁵⁰ Martin, 'Qu'est-ce que l'antiquité "tardive"?', 265.

⁵¹ Gelzer, 'Altertumswissenschaft', 175 ff.

externalist explanation, as distinct from descriptions of Late Antiquity's internal coherence, was shed by work following that of Peter Brown, and to what extent a 'provincial' rather than an Italic criterion of reference was consequentially adopted, and in what way, is debatable,⁵² and will be considered further below.

The reclamation of Antiquity has generally been given to a revaluation of Late Antiquity's literary and religious output, and there does not seem to have been much echo of more deliberately reflexive proposals to configure Late Antiquity systematically according to criteria of differential temporality – and hence differential periodisation – which might account for the ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, artistic, social, economic and juridico-political transformations, continuities and breaks.⁵³ Some elements of such a broad view have been independently proposed in broad strokes, such as continuous urbanism.⁵⁴ But in all cases, the predominant trend has been culturalist – albeit of a demotic rather than the bourgeois character preferred by a Marrou or a Rostovtzeff. Scholarship has generally been caught up in the supposition that the period was transitional, that it looked not only backwards towards classical antiquity, but also forwards towards the Middle Ages: the 'local' or parochial Middle Ages in contrast to cosmopolitan Antiquity,⁵⁵ or the 'medieval cultures' of Byzantium, Islam and the Latin West, engrossed in a 'souci de soi'.⁵⁶ In virtually no case do we have the full counterpart of the systemic case made for decline.⁵⁷

It must be admitted that the model of differential temporality not only is complex, but might, if no articulating element were identified, be incoherent chronologically. Thus, if one were to consider the theme of continuous urbanism, one would need to extend the period backwards to Alexander or, more restrictively and in awareness of possible problems thereby arising, propose the period AD 400–700 for the span of Late Antiquity, being the period during which the most dramatic transformations took place.⁵⁸ A recent proposition by Fowden suggests that, on criteria of religious history, a more useful term would be the Millennium, from Augustus to c. 1000.

⁵² Cf. Cameron, 'A. H. M. Jones', 234, 245.

⁵³ See above all Martin, 'Qu'est-ce que l'antiquité "tardive"?', 277–97.

⁵⁴ Clover and Humphreys, *Tradition*, 6 ff. For a review of this topic, Kazhdan and Cutler, 'Continuity and discontinuity', 437 ff. Again, one should be wary of succumbing to the romanticising drift of the idea of the *polis* as free and autonomous. In actual fact *poleis* formed component parts of leagues and empires and were subject to their imperatives in many ways. One should also be attentive to how the *poleis* were handled in the ancient sources, these including Punic Carthage and Babylon: van der Spek, 'Babylonian city', 57 ff. On Carthage compared to Rome in classical historiography, positively: Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, 53 f.

⁵⁵ Clover and Humphreys, *Tradition*, 3. ⁵⁶ Stroumsa, *Sacrifice*, 24.

⁵⁷ Ward-Perkins, *Fall of Rome*. ⁵⁸ Clover and Humphreys, *Tradition*, 7, 11.

This is a consideration which includes the emergence of the classical forms of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, still recognisable today, and a notion of duration that is determined primarily by cultural, conceptual and literary developments.⁵⁹

As a theme in the history of religions, this suggestion has the merit of sectoral analysis to which specific chronological markers might be applied, and of the precise topical definition of a history marked successively, across Judaism, Christianity and Islam, by prophetic, scriptural and Patristic or classical moments.⁶⁰ This is a period that saw the continuing canonisation of Greek classics that had started earlier in Alexandria, of the Septuagint, the New Testament, the Vulgate, the Talmud, the Avesta and the Qur'ān.⁶¹ If the religious history of the period were so considered, it would be most serviceable for the interpretation of religious aspects of Islam in terms of longer-term trends, with the Qur'ān emerging as the culmination of a process that had been solidifying over a number of centuries.⁶² Given temporal extension, this is of course no longer just Late Antiquity; but it does have sectoral merit and coherence.

Other sectoral periodisations have more conventionally late antique termini. Consideration of ethnic criteria would place the end of Late Antiquity at *c.* 570; of linguistic and religious criteria at more or less the same time; of cultural criteria perhaps with Bede (d. 735); of artistic criteria with the fourth and fifth centuries; of economic criteria up until the tenth century – with the rather unhelpful overall result that one might average out these termini to around 600,⁶³ these considerations pertaining primarily to the Latin West. Others have set the period 200–400 as the one upon which research needs to concentrate, with vast differences separating the one terminus from the other, all conceived in terms of Roman history,⁶⁴ and yet others seem implicitly to reinstate, without further consideration, the Pirenne thesis regarding the cultural and political unity of the Mediterranean sundered by Islam,⁶⁵ signalling the end of Late Antiquity in negative and catastrophic terms.⁶⁶

Yet all these possibilities of delimitation – apart from Fowden's – seem to end more or less around 600, terminating 'a pregnancy already well

⁵⁹ Fowden, 'Contextualizing', 149 f., now argued at book-length in *Before and after Muhammad*.

⁶⁰ Fowden, 'Contextualizing', 152 ff.

⁶¹ On which theme, see Smith, 'Scripture', 31 f., 46 ff. ⁶² Smith, 'Scripture', 31.

⁶³ Martin, 'Qu'est-ce que l'antiquité "tardive"?', 278 f., 285 f., 289, 296 ff., 300.

⁶⁴ Swain, 'Introduction', *passim*. ⁶⁵ *Cambridge Ancient History*, 14, 'Preface', xix.

⁶⁶ For a sketch of other termini and criteria proposed, especially in Germanophone scholarship, see Martin, 'Qu'est-ce que l'antiquité "tardive"?', 267 ff.

advanced' and bound to west European moorings.⁶⁷ They share the virtue of blending well with conventional academic boundaries. The extension beyond 600, initially attractive to some, has been greeted with reserve and dismissed as 'a recent fashion';⁶⁸ when including Islam, it has sometimes been the object of some derision.⁶⁹ Brown's construal of Hārūn al-Rashīd rather than Charlemagne as the true heir of the ancient world,⁷⁰ and his later 'œcumenical revision', setting up the two contemporaries on a par with one another in this respect,⁷¹ might imply some change of heart, and possibly also a response to institutional academic resistance, and clearly a conservative reaction to the earlier enthusiasms of Late Antiquity scholarship.⁷²

But to possible chronological termini should be added a crucial point of 'capital importance', that of the extension of geographical boundaries,⁷³ beyond what has been described as western Antiquity.⁷⁴ This would be correlative to the disengagement of Late Antiquity from a concept captive to the Italian location of Rome, and a consequent move to parts that had by then become more cosmopolitan than Rome ever was, and more central to the constitution of the empire, parts carrying the historical sense and burden of the era.⁷⁵ In themselves, chronological termini, however decided, do not give sense to the series of developments and events that one might designate as late antique, medieval, or whatever. One would need to search for their coherence, and coherence is an aspect of structure, not of calendrical time through which it flows. Geography, historically considered, is implicit in this.

Of 'capital importance' in this respect is the need to factor in what has been characterised as the geographical equivalent of the chronological flight from the old centres.⁷⁶ This would entail *ab initio* that one steer

⁶⁷ Fowden, 'Elefantiasi', 684. ⁶⁸ *Cambridge Ancient History*, 14, 'Preface', xviii f.

⁶⁹ Giardina, 'Esplosione', 176. ⁷⁰ See Brown, 'World', 17.

⁷¹ Athanassiadi, 'Antiquité tardive', 315. Brown himself ('World', 23) spoke of an 'amende honorable' to the West.

⁷² Fowden, 'Contextualizing', 149. Signs of conceptual fatigue and hallmarks of academic orthodoxy in contrast to the freshness of the 1970s and 1980s are highlighted by Athanassiadi, 'Antiquité tardive', 315.

⁷³ Brown, 'World', 17, and, most elaborately, Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 12 ff.

⁷⁴ As in the most interesting discussion of Hübinger, *Spätantike*, 18 f., who, while considering the Roman empire, as had Droysen before him, as a fulfilment rather than as a token of decline (25 f., 29 ff.), focuses his attention on Germanic Europe. This is of course unsurprising in a view which uses a spatial metaphor, considering the main intelligible historical categories to be cultural circles or culture areas (*Kulturkreise*) – *ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁵ Hübinger, *Spätantike*, 17 f. It should be noted that the word 'burden' was used here, and not 'destiny' or one of its equivalent terms.

⁷⁶ Bowersock, 'Riflessioni', 20.

away from the question of roots, legacies and heritages, and move on to historical dynamics.⁷⁷ It is not origin as norm, a matter deeply inscribed onto a mind trained in the classics, and not geographical fastness, that would lend sense to a historical dynamic. It is rather the dynamic by which a structure moves along both time and space, and the resultant historical direction. This is not an inevitable dynamic, but not the product of chance either,⁷⁸ and not a teleological history in reverse, inevitably leading, in this case, to the Middle Ages and on to modern Europe.⁷⁹

Speaking of a historical dynamic leads the discussion to identify actors that articulate the elements of this period, and direct them, bearing in mind all the while that this positing of a direction is not taken to imply a fated process that is even, imperturbably composed, without variation and residues, like Braudel's 'glacial' surface of civilisations. Chronological and other confusions, and indeed absurdities, may and do arise when a binding element is not identified in the definition of a historiographic category or a historical period.⁸⁰ Without such an identification, one would have with Late Antiquity, as one does with 'early modern history', an indeterminacy that 'confers an aura of innovation on an agenda that is by now as conventional as anything said about the Renaissance'.⁸¹

It is proposed here that the binding element and hinge in the case of Late Antiquity is neither Athens nor Rome, neither Constantinople nor Damascus, neither Charlemagne nor Hārūn al-Rashīd, nor is it classical Greek or Roman culture, however described, nor Christian Orthodoxy or the Holy Man. It is oecumenical empire, along with its urban institutes and its political theology, pagan, Christian and Muslim. In a perspective such as this, the fast distinctions of East and West lose determinant salience, and one would consequently be able to understand what might be implied by the famous complaint about the Orontes flowing into the Tiber in a way

⁷⁷ Cf. the view of G. Rodenwald ('Zur Begrenzung und Gliederung der Spätantike', *Jhrb. d. Deutschen Archäologischen Institut*, 59/60 (1944–45), 84, quoted in Hübinger, *Spätantike*, 57 n. 37), that the beginning of Late Antiquity is not the same thing as its roots. Cameron ('Thoughts', 2 ff.) gives an excellent treatment of Momigliano's thoughts on Late Antiquity as the repository of Europe's 'triple heritage' of Judaism, Christianity and classical culture.

⁷⁸ Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 9.

⁷⁹ See the cautionary remarks on teleology by Wickham (*Inheritance*, 4), who argues that Europe was not born in the early Middle Ages, and that, for someone in the year 1000 looking forward to future industrialisation, the bet would have been on Egypt, not the Rhineland.

⁸⁰ See Cameron, 'A. H. M. Jones', 241–3, on various termini proposed for Late Antiquity, none argued convincingly.

⁸¹ Starn, 'Early modern muddle', 296, who adds (302 f.) that this diminishes the liabilities of periodisation, using 'complexity' as a 'covering trope'.

commensurate with the complexity of history.⁸² The Roman empire was indeed imperial, but Rome was also manfully provincial. The geographical and chronographic incorporation of the empire into the universal historiography of the time was the work of provincials, Polybius, Castor of Rhodes and others, and later of Christian chronographers as well, working within the framework of a Roman empire making possible the cultural Hellenisation of the world.⁸³ The nominative terms used to designate this period, as late Roman or late antique, and its history that of late Romanity or of Late Antiquity, are implicated, as implicit bearers of a constancy of direction, in the definition of the period.⁸⁴

Such a consideration would need to give the notion of imperial translation a much stronger and consequent sense, one that late antique Byzantines, for one, were clearly aware of, self-interested as this awareness many have been.⁸⁵ One would need to consider the Eurasian oecumene from the northern Mediterranean littoral to Iran, most particularly following the move of the effective rather than the notional capital to Constantinople, when this empire came to be dependent on maritime communications,⁸⁶ as a coherent historical unit. This was a region that had for centuries been one of intense communication, limited by the technological possibilities of the age, and of contestation. Like other large-scale units such as the

⁸² Juvenal, *Satire* 3.63. This complaint was seemingly directed against the influence of Asia Minor and Greece, and the Orontes was used as a metonym for Hellenistic influences overall: Kaizer, 'Oriental cults', 27 n. 3. See also Belayche, 'Deae syriae', 567 f., who shows that Oriental religions in Rome were perceived not as Oriental per se, but rather as external superstitions.

⁸³ Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, 20, 29 ff., 41, 52 ff., 63 ff.; Clarke, 'Universal perspectives', 252 and *passim*. For social and urban counterparts of this Hellenisation (including Cappadocia and Judaea), see, for instance, Jones, 'Greeks', 5 ff.; for the workings of the Roman imperial cult in Anatolia as a mechanism of incorporation and articulation based upon cities, see Price, *Rituals*, 2412 and pt 1, *passim*. With regard to Syria, note that there is evidence that Hellenism was not, as generally assumed, confined to cities. It has been suggested that this general assumption is modelled upon the image of Hellenophone bishops counterposed to Syriac monks (Bowersock, *Hellenism*, 29 f.).

⁸⁴ On constancy of direction, cf. the comments of Gerschenkron, *Continuity*, 21 f., 27, but see the warning (20) that stringent conditions for the consideration of continuity are normally relaxed and become associatively impressionistic statements, 'a hybrid mass . . . gladly welcomed to the field of the social sciences as a most palatable mixture of scientific cognition and social desirability'. See also Wilcox, *Measure*, 52 f., 223, on the distinction between episodic and linear time, the chronological order of the former having no causal consequence. This constancy of direction is of course reflected in late antique historical writing, and in ecclesiastical writings as well, excepting Tertullian and others who saw the *res Graecorum*, associated with Hellenism, to be foreign to Romanity (Fischer, *Oriens-Occidens*, 27, 30, 32).

⁸⁵ The Frankish claim to *translatio imperii* is of course much later, and fraudulent in having been introduced after a major chronological and structural gap. It would be interesting to note an indicator of the parochialism of Frankish political vocabulary of the time that *translatio* originally meant the transfer of a bishopric: Irmscher, 'Neurom', 433.

⁸⁶ Mitchell, *Later Roman Empire*, 386, 407.

Mediterranean, this region might be considered as a continuum of discontinuities, a space of contiguous but not necessarily connected regions, a micro-ecological constellation of micro-ecologies; regions which, when connected, were so by virtue of overarching, higher, unnatural instances, such as states imperial and otherwise, cultures, and cults, resulting in a situation best described as 'dense fragmentation complemented by striving towards political control of communications'.⁸⁷ In this, the role of empires was crucial.

The extreme fragmentation of this Eurasian area notwithstanding, one would need to take stock of levels at which analysis could usefully be pitched to consider elements of unity, and to account for the continuous wars that pitted the various large-scale political units against each other almost continually. The Polybian model of œcumenical imperial succession, and the distinction it makes between accomplished empires with œcumenical vocations and others with more restricted regional and other vocations, and its later redaction of empires in terms of Christian salvation history, would not be much off the mark as an heuristic guide, provided that one were to remove the teleological and monistic ideas inherent in it and consider it as the impress of an imperial experience in a world of empires of which imperial subjects were aware. These subjects, or at least those who mattered to the empire, signalled this awareness by composing, in an œcumenical spirit, histories, world chronographies, and world geographies and ethnographies as well.⁸⁸ They also signalled it philosophically by a cosmopolitanism that goes under the vague title of Stoicism, most of whose representatives seem to have been provincials, indeed Orientals.⁸⁹ Some state systems signalled this by instituting universal calendars; the Seleucid era, first introduced by Antiochus I in 312 BC and named after his father, persisted as a dating system in general – but not exclusive – use for nearly a millennium.⁹⁰ The extension of universal history in a

⁸⁷ Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, 13, 25, 54 and ch. 3, *passim*.

⁸⁸ See the discussion of Baldry, *Unity of Mankind*, 169 ff. As a work of geography and ethnology, Pliny's *Natural History* displays 'a planetary consciousness', and is an encyclopaedia written in a triumphalist mode premised on the centrality of Rome: Murphy, *Pliny the Elder*, 154 ff., 160 ff., and ch. 4, *passim* (quotation at 216).

⁸⁹ Baldry, *Unity of Mankind*, 151 f., 159.

⁹⁰ The Julian calendar, rational and easy of use as it is, based on Greek and Egyptian science and geared towards purposes of central control, remained for long practically confined to Roman (rather than imperial) needs and uses, used in the provinces along with synchronisation with dating by consuls and regnal calendars: Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, 196 f., 209 ff., and *passim*. This is an incongruity that I cannot understand; interpretation in terms of haughty Roman provincialism does not seem to outweigh its practical and symbolic generalisation, nor does it appear that the administrative mechanisms and areas of utility for its empire-wide use were lacking. Feeney (*Caesar's Calendar*,

unified compass by Pompeius Trogus took the notion of *translatio imperii* beyond Polybius' integration of the eastern Mediterranean with Rome and Carthage, beginning with the 104th Olympiad, less than a century before Polybius, and well into western Asia and to the time of Ninus, thus transcending any particular Roman conquests and working with the very idea of conquest itself.⁹¹

Antistrophe and translation: Rome, New Rome, imperial translation

It has been suggested that setting up the period of c. 400–700 as the age of Late Antiquity makes sense 'only from the standpoint of Roman destiny'.⁹² It has also been suggested, and this is much in conformity with disciplinary boundaries that Late Antiquity scholarship sought to challenge initially, that it is on the West 'that we need to focus' in studying this period,⁹³ the East having survived Barbarian onslaughts for no obvious reason 'beyond good luck and good management'.⁹⁴ Not unnaturally, it has been suggested in parallel manner that limiting consideration of Late Antiquity to the eastern Mediterranean region compromises the viability of this historiographic category,⁹⁵ the assumption here being driven, in all likelihood, by concern for chronology.

The means of good fortune here would include, concretely and among other things, the fortifications of Constantinople and its geographical location, the secure tax base from Constantinople to the Nile, and a variety of military alliances, including one with Arabs who, under Queen Māwīya, helped save Constantinople from the Gothic assault of 378.⁹⁶ These factors surely betoken a greater historical coherence, greater administrative capacities, a more cohesive polity, and a more continuous and resilient system of alliances, and of course greater economic capacity, matters that would vitiate the view that the East was not 'innately and structurally more

209) finds this striking, and compares this situation to China, where incorporation within an empire was signalled by 'receiving' the imperial calendar.

⁹¹ Wilcox, *Measure*, 108 f.

⁹² Clover and Humphreys, *Tradition*, 11. On the other hand, the observation has been made that the West has been relatively neglected in Late Antiquity studies, but that casting doubt upon the notion of decline makes little sense in the former western empire: James, 'Rise', 25 f., 29.

⁹³ Ward-Perkins, *Fall of Rome*, 42. ⁹⁴ Ward-Perkins, *Fall of Rome*, 46, 58.

⁹⁵ Cameron, 'Late Antiquity', 132 f.

⁹⁶ Sozomenos, *Historia*, 7.1.1; Ward-Perkins, *Fall of Rome*, 58 ff.; Sartre, *Etudes*, 143.

cohesive than the West',⁹⁷ and would in fact tend to imply the contrary, without necessary appeal to matters innate.

One would therefore need to consider the question of Rome's persistence beyond simply recalling geographical divisions which are put forward as historical categories,⁹⁸ and to avoid the 'panoramas of ideological geography' which expand with each glance, but retreat with each question.⁹⁹ One needs, as suggested, to look at Rome's persistence in terms of what the Roman empire had become, and this requires weighting space with time, including the spatial translocation of what was Rome. In this regard,¹⁰⁰ a number of basic facts are clear indicators of the thrust of this argument. There was a real shift of the imperial centre of gravity to the East within the Roman empire of Late Antiquity,¹⁰¹ and determinate ways in which the Roman empire of the sixth century became Near Eastern.¹⁰² Consequently, the focus of a broader historical perspective needs to move away from the internal evolution of western Rome to the new imperial centre of gravity in the Fertile Crescent,¹⁰³ and its more proximate, Second, Rome.

The whole strategic balance of the Roman empire had changed, and moved eastwards in the course of the second century, precipitating the famous crises of the time, and thus rendering the 'abandonment' of the West in the fifth century understandable, all the more so as it was not made 'in

⁹⁷ Ward-Perkins, *Fall of Rome*, 47. Brown (*World*, 122, 124) maintains that Barbarians in the West entered a society 'not strong enough to hold them at bay but not flexible enough to lead the conquerors captive by absorbing them into Roman life', being a society with 'neither strength nor skill'. On different ways in which various Germanic polities entered the world of western Rome, see above all the synoptic treatment of Geary, *Myth of Nations*, 114 f., and cf. *ibid.*, 42 ff., 64 ff., 78 ff. The suggestion, or perhaps the wish, that the West might have become 'resurgent' under a Germanic dynasty (Ward-Perkins, *Fall of Rome*, 58, 67 ff.) is interesting but debatable. Wickham (*Inheritance*, 200) suggests a more verisimilar account, looking at the history of Latin Europe in the fifth and sixth centuries in terms not of Germanisation but of militarisation, rendering it comparable to Byzantium and, in some measure, to the Caliphate.

⁹⁸ Witness, for instance, the awareness of the problem by Marrou who, scrupulously, proposed that Latin Late Antiquity should be seen as corresponding to early Byzantium (*Saint Augustin*, 699), and who wonders why the West succumbed while the East, equally targeted by Barbarians, did not (*ibid.*, 701 n. 2). Brown ('World of Late Antiquity', 12–13) discusses Jones' view that the western empire 'paid the price for having to become a Latin Byzantium'.

⁹⁹ Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, 473.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Bowersock (*Hellenism*, 4 f.), who sees in the stress on the Orient in Late Antiquity scholarship a situation where space seems to determine time, a matter that goes contrary to ancient periodisations (still very present in the literature) based upon ethnic or local criteria.

¹⁰¹ Cameron, *Mediterranean*, 28.

¹⁰² Brown, *World*, 157 f., excepting Rome and Ravenna (*ibid.*, 159).

¹⁰³ Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 81.

a fit of absence of mind'.¹⁰⁴ This shift was accompanied by the promotion of provincial notabilities to positions of metropolitan authority, beginning under Trajan and Hadrian, intensifying under the Severans with their Syrian connections. This also saw the continuing promotion of Barbarians, particularly Germans, to positions of high military command,¹⁰⁵ and later, in Byzantium, of a variety of other people considered to have high martial qualities. The extension of Roman citizenship to all free inhabitants of the empire in 212 highlights this move towards the de-provincialisation of Rome.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the military and administrative shift of the imperial centre under Diocletian, and the foundation of Constantinople in an economically and culturally more active central part of the Roman imperial state, is simply a register of this profound shift – in the perspective of which Justinian's irredentism appears singularly anachronistic and vainglorious.¹⁰⁷

All this and much else indicating this shift is well known. It would suggest that assuming the geography of the empire to have been spatially immobile, with a stable centre and enduring peripheries, is not a helpful way of conceiving its historical dynamic which would, on the contrary, suggest that the imperial centre of gravity shifted. This need not compromise the integrity of the Roman empire, although it does compromise an Italianate conception of Rome: a geographical translation which was one of continuous recomposition, not a symptom of decomposition,¹⁰⁸ various aspects of administrative and other areas of downsizing notwithstanding.¹⁰⁹

The point being made here is not celebratory, nor does it necessarily involve 'the possibility of turning one's back on the majesty of the Roman Empire in order to salute Byzantium, Ravenna and Mecca'.¹¹⁰ It is, rather, that we are dealing with a continuous historical trajectory which encompassed Rome as well as Constantinople and Mecca, one which is operative despite linguistic and other divides, divides arising from the traditions of

¹⁰⁴ Millar, 'Empire', 146. See the dramatic description of this abandonment by Cumont, *Oriental Religions*, 1 ff., expressed in different ways by Ward-Perkins, who speaks of a return to pre-history (*Fall of Rome*, 117 ff. – see also 11, 138 ff., 151 ff., and *passim*, and figs. 6.1 showing levels of economic complexity in different parts of the empire between 300 and 700, and 7.3, illustrating zooarchaeological evidence for the approximate height of the cow in the Iron Age (115.5 cm), Roman Europe (120 cm) and Latin Europe (112 cm).

¹⁰⁵ Bowersock, 'Senators'; Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 38, 48, 195 ff.; Todd, *Early Germans*, 59 ff.

¹⁰⁶ That this extension of citizenship rights may have aimed at increasing the tax base for the military (Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 190) is not an argument against the broader implications of the movement under discussion.

¹⁰⁷ On the disastrous cost of the Justinianic wars in the West to the empire, see Cameron, *Mediterranean*, ch. 5. The effects of war in this period are very well brought out by Shaw, 'War and violence', 142, 145 and *passim*.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Cumont, *Oriental Religions*, 1. ¹⁰⁹ On this, Wickham, *Inheritance*, 256, 262.

¹¹⁰ Bowersock, 'Vanishing paradigm', 39.

classical philology, which still beclouds historical perception.¹¹¹ This is a historical trajectory which translated the Roman capital to Constantinople, subjecting its ideological baggage to an *aggiornamento* in terms of Christianity. Following a first mention by Themistius in 357,¹¹² the New Rome was officially declared in the Canons of the Councils of Constantinople (359) and of Chalcedon (451), with decisive consequences for the history of the Church. The identification of Rome with Constantinople became thereafter standard throughout the Mediterranean, with the First Rome eclipsed in the minds of imperial citizens, at least in the East.¹¹³ Fewer and fewer people in Latin Europe of the fifth and sixth centuries called themselves Romani, where their ancestors around AD 400 would have considered themselves to be Roman.¹¹⁴ It is not insignificant that the political capital of east Roman Italy itself was to become Ravenna, not Rome, and this geopolitical shift was not lost on the Ostrogoths.

The fact is that this translation of Rome's ideological and other cultural baggage to the East was not a novelty, nor can it be regarded as a foreign implantation in unfamiliar, uncharted or otherwise unlikely territory. As suggested, Rome had long moved from being an aggressive and vigorous, if provincial, Italic power, to being the centre of an œcumenical empire. In this process, Roman culture, religion, and forms of authority and of its exercise, had undergone a process of inflected universalisation, which

¹¹¹ This point was clearly stated long ago by Spengler, *Decline*, 2.191, and is clearly linked to the ancient/medieval/modern periodisation. One might consider the polemical view (Liebeschuetz, 'Late antiquity', 1 n. 1) that Spengler's Arabic Culture was 'a version of Late Antiquity under another name'.

¹¹² Bowersock, 'Old and New Rome', 41.

¹¹³ Bowersock, 'Le tre Rome', 978, 981 ff., who also wrote of the Italian Rome receding from consciousness despite the geographical knowledge of the learned (Bowersock, 'Old and New Rome', 47 f.): thus in the famous sixth-century mosaic map at Ma'dabā in Transjordan, Constantinople is quite simply marked as Rome, at a time when the Popes concocted the recovery of the Donation of Constantine (Bowersock, 'Le tre Rome', 987, and see Bowersock, *Mosaics*, 116 f.), while the twelfth-century chronicler Menasses, writing of Rome's plunder by the Vandals in 455, stated that this calamity befell only the Old Rome (Fuhrmann, 'Romidee', 530). For a historical account of this translation, both as historical process and as perception, see Irmscher, 'Neurom', 432 ff., 437 f., 439. The idea of the Second Rome replacing the older Rome to all intents and purposes is well presented, graphically but in a manner unfinished, by Philippe, *Spectacle*. It may very well have been the case that Constantine could hardly have envisaged replacing Rome by Constantinople as the imperial capital, that he returned to Rome to celebrate his *vicennalia* in 326, and that the new city of Constantine was modelled on other new imperial cities (Mitchell, *Later Roman Empire*, 312). But one needs to take into account the dialectic between geo-political reality and Romanist ideologies, and Constantine's policies towards the Roman senatorial class after his assumption of undivided power as well.

¹¹⁴ Wickham, *Inheritance*, 200, adding (201) that the imperial image of the city had been replaced by a Rome of basilicas and martyrs' tombs, later linked by the Carolingians to the idea of empire in a Frankish framework blending together Rome, Troy and Israel.

is, using a linguistic criterion, usually understood as Hellenisation. But Hellenisation ran parallel to Orientalisation within Rome, most saliently in the spheres of religion and of imperialism. The two were parallel and inextricable,¹¹⁵ and no purpose is served by the implicit assumption that the former, Hellenisation, was in some way natural, and that the latter was contrived or tantamount to a disnature.

Thus the translation under review was to lands that had long been Hellenised culturally, with political Romanisation reinforcing this older process and giving it a fairly stable direction. When it comes to the Fertile Crescent, the hoary conceptual schema opposing Hellenism and Semitism does not help much in understanding the period. Hellenism had become the late antique cultural idiom throughout imperial territories, and marked that unprecedented cultural continuum from Sicily to the Euphrates that was underwritten by imperial Romanity.¹¹⁶ That the Fertile Crescent was, in many ways, the hub of this universalist koine is well expressed by the view that, in Syria, the distance between local and universal history was shortest.¹¹⁷ It could be asserted, without serious exaggeration and with all the caveats concerning the applicability of meta-historical categories anywhere, that Hellenism 'was, in a certain sense, the Semitic bedrock'¹¹⁸ in this region, or that it had so become.

The indices and processes of Hellenism in the Near East, the lands towards which the imperial centre was translated, thereby marking the beginnings of Late Antiquity, are myriad. They cannot be taken up here, and have been well described in some detail.¹¹⁹ That the picture – linguistic, iconographic, and cultural in a more general way – is very complex does not compromise maintaining that Hellenism was the normative cultural and political carrier of the empire, not least for those who mattered socially and politically.¹²⁰ The medium of Latin had a particular

¹¹⁵ Lhéritier, 'Histoire byzantine', 204.

¹¹⁶ Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*, 183, and cf. Baldry, *Unity of Mankind*, 131.

¹¹⁷ Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 64 and ch. 3, *passim*. On the peculiar resistance of Egyptian particularism, see Bowersock, *Hellenism*, 55 f.

¹¹⁸ Bowersock, *Hellenism*, 73.

¹¹⁹ Bowersock, *Hellenism*, *passim*; Millar, *Roman Near East*, ch. 13; Butcher, *Roman Syria*, 273 ff. It should be recalled here that, later, Syria provided Rome with five Popes between 685 and 741.

¹²⁰ On onomastics, Butcher, *Roman Syria*, 284 f.; Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 2.155 and chs. 10 and 11, *passim*; Sartre, *Bostra*, 161 ff. On mosaics and mosaic iconography, Bowersock, *Mosaics*, 6, 28, 35, and *passim*; Balty, 'Version orientale'; Butcher, *Roman Syria*, 307 ff.; Dussaud, *Pénétration*, 56 ff.; Stern, *Mosaïques*. On pagan mythology and religion, Barr, 'Philo'; Bowersock, *Hellenism*, ch. 2. On Greek and vernacular languages, Butcher, *Roman Syria*, 277 and 275, for the decline of epigraphic remains in local languages; Dagron, 'Origines', 35; Duneau, 'Pénétration de l'hellénisme', 22; for comparative material on Punic Africa, Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 16 ff. This fairly random thematic

history.¹²¹ As a language of the Church, Latin was initially used in Africa, and Greek had for long been used for ecclesiastical purposes, including liturgy, in Rome and in Gaul, and continued this career as the language of an imperial, hierarchical and œcumenical church based in Constantinople. It eventually but slowly replaced Latin as the language of imperial legitimacy,¹²² thus continuing its previous career as the language of pagan universalism,¹²³ and indeed, during the struggle between Christianity and paganism within the empire, as the nominative index of paganism, *Hellenismos*.¹²⁴

What does need emphasis, however, as historical direction and the Roman East are discussed, is the concordant confluence within the Roman œcumene or Hellenism and Orientalism, a confluence that ultimately resulted in the triumph of Christianity, a religion at once Oriental and Hellenistic, but also Roman. Orientalism and Hellenism, both used here for indicative and associative convenience rather than as ideal types or stereotypes, acted upon different and intersecting instances of the imperial Roman formation, or were at least so construed, the Hellenistic acting upon culture in the sense of literary, philosophical and artistic output (including mythology, political theology and iconography), and the Oriental upon religion and political ideology, but also on important components of the

and research catalogue can be extended at will; but note the warning, which can be given a more general remit, that the use of Greek inscriptions does not entirely justify the conclusion that Greek was the spoken language, and that one must not construct 'ghost communities' from epigraphic evidence (Macdonald, 'Reflections', 181, 183 ff.).

¹²¹ This was a complex and contradictory imperial history, which saw the reinforcement of Latin as an administrative and legal language after the move to Constantinople, until it finally ceded this position as the language of court to Greek under Tiberius (who assumed the purple in 578), and as the language of the judiciary until the same period, only to be dropped in favour of Greek on money and in titulature during the reign of Heraclius: Dagron, 'Origines', 27 f., 37 ff., 42 ff. The connection of the growing salience of Latin from the late third century until the division of the empire in 395 is correlated to the decline of knowledge of Greek by emperors (and their entourages), and the imposition and enforcement by Diocletian of Roman law across the empire, subjects having become citizens, and the correlative promotion of the teaching of Latin (Jones, 'Greeks', 12 ff.). But clearly, the œcumenical language was considered to have been Greek. Thus the famous inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam, recording the victory of the Sasanian Emperor Shāpūr over the Roman emperor Valerian, and the capture of the latter in 260, was recorded in Greek rather than Latin, alongside middle Persian and Parthian (Maricq, 'Res Gestae', 304). Earlier, the famous bilingual inscription at al-Rawwāfa in north-western Arabia, dated between 166 and 169, in which Marcus Aurelius was described as the divine master of the world, was composed in Nabataean, the local prestige language, and in the œcumenical language, Greek (on this see Bowersock, 'Bilingual inscription', and Graf, 'Saracens', 228 f.).

¹²² Dagron, 'Origines', 46, 48 f., 54; Cameron, *Christianity*, 310.

¹²³ Bowersock, *Hellenism*, 7 ff.; Schouler, 'Hellénisme et humanisme', 270 ff.; Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 114, 167.

¹²⁴ Bouffartigue, 'Julien', 252 ff., 257 ff.; Bowersock, *Julian*, 83 ff.; *Hellenism*, 10, 21, 34.

conceptual and architectonic structure of late Roman Neo-Platonism.¹²⁵ Needless to say, they were both in turn moulded by the Roman empire within which they acted, according to local conditions.

In an œcumenical setting such as the one under discussion, it will be well to remember that the boundaries between the local and the alien were not always clear, and that the definition of either is a moot point and analytically unimportant, despite its relevance for the self-definition and self-delimitation of certain historical actors of the time.¹²⁶ The uneven and idiosyncratic Orientalism of the metropolitan centre had its counterpart in the uneven and idiosyncratic Occidentalism of provincial elites;¹²⁷ one is bound to conceive both as being situational. This in itself was a matter not unnaturally concomitant with empires absorbing local conditions correlative with the imperatives of expansion.¹²⁸ At no point was the Greek paragon itself uncontaminated.¹²⁹ At virtually no point was Rome herself entirely pure, despite spasmodic xenophobia expressed mainly in terms of opposition to Oriental cults in the name of *mos maiorum* counterposed to *externa superstitio*.¹³⁰ Yet many Romans, including at least one Pope in the fourth century, accurately thought that religious cosmopolitanism reflected

¹²⁵ On this last theme, see especially Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles*, and Fowden, *Hermes*.

¹²⁶ Thus, for instance, Dodds ('Numenius', 4 f., 7 ff., 11), is aware of the difficulty of identifying possibly foreign, un-Hellenic elements in the philosophical output of Numenius, and of the question as to whether such ostensibly foreign elements were in fact absent from Greek philosophy, adding that Numenius was in any case ready to welcome 'all the superstitions of his time, whatever their origin, and thereby contributed to the eventual degradation of Greek political thought'.

¹²⁷ Cf. Fowden, *Hermes*, 213 f.

¹²⁸ A dramatic case in point is the attraction of all things Babylonian to the Achaemenids as they expanded westwards, yielding 'the figurative conquest of the victors by their captives': an empire built on cooptation rather than coercion, tapping into institutions and perpetuating the culture of their subjects, keeping administrators, written language (Akkadian) and cult festivals (Ehrenberg, 'Persian conquerors', 95 ff., 100 ff.). Later, Antiochus of Commagene (69–31 BC) was to claim descent from Artaxerxes II (Arjomand, 'Ardašir', 247).

¹²⁹ For earlier periods, the formative salience of Akkadian myths for instance, and the Greek lexicon (Burkert, *Revolution*, 34 f., 88 ff., 114 ff.); for the classical age, the enthusiastic Athenian embrace of Persian architectural, iconographic, ideological and sumptuary norms (Miller, *Athens and Persia*, 78 f., 120 ff., 150 ff., 239 ff.), arising from aristocratic affinities and geographical, social and political commingling (*ibid.*, 89 ff., 98 ff., 248 ff.) – Herodotus (*Histories*, 4.189) attributes Athena's attire to Libyan models. Later, Alexander's royalist Orientalism was to become notorious, though he was the first neither to wear the diadem nor to don Persian dress, the tyrants of Syracuse having done this before him (Fox, *Alexander*, 277). His and his successors' penchant for architectural gigantism and kitsch has also been noted and interpreted in terms of Orientalism: Brown, 'Novelty, ingenuity', *passim*.

¹³⁰ Turcan, *Cults*, 10 ff., 122 ff. and 14, 16 f., where the author comments on the cultic needs of roving armies, sailors and mercenaries; Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*, 209 ff. On *superstitio* and the evolution of the term from designating excessive religious enthusiasm, to magic, foreign religions, and ultimately to Christianity, see Beard *et al.*, *Religions*, 215 ff., 221, 239 ff., and Sachot, 'Religio/superstitio'.

Rome's dominance.¹³¹ As one would expect, provincial political ambitions were expressed in metropolitan terms, and greater ambitions in imperial terms, as was famously the case with the Palmyrene Zenobia Augusta.¹³²

Within a perspective such as this, one would see the internalist approach to late Roman Orientalism, and especially to Roman religion, taken a century ago by Franz Cumont, as being perhaps a consequentially Late Antiquity approach.¹³³ His historical syntheses were, in this sense, precocious,¹³⁴ and his overall description of Roman religions of Oriental provenance has been criticised in many respects, but has not been surpassed conceptually.¹³⁵ This internalist approach saw Roman developments in terms of a process that involved the endogenous appropriation of elements of Oriental provenance, without their being considered as degenerative, but rather as signalling a broader direction.¹³⁶ For Cumont as for many others, this direction ultimately resulted in Christianity, it being, in his view, a superior stage in the history of religion,¹³⁷ a matter seen as having disallowed him from a systematic understanding of polytheism.¹³⁸

Notwithstanding the normative views of the Orient and the linear and ultimately teleological character of Cumont's historiographic postulate, the

¹³¹ Chadwick, 'Pope Damasus', 314 ff.

¹³² Millar, *Roman Near East*, 34 f., 83 f., 143 f., 159 ff., 319 ff., and see, synoptically, the titulature studied by Bauzou, 'Zénobie', 38 ff. Her local claims to œcumenism were expressed in terms of Seleucid and Ptolemaic genealogies (Stoneman, *Palmyra*, 112), and in her self-representation, in Egypt, as a new Cleopatra (Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, 134). See also Seyrig, 'Antiquités, 9'. In the same vein, the view that Julia Domna and other empresses and emperors of Syrian origin constituted some kind of 'Weiberregiment' who corrupted Roman republicanism and Orientalised the whole system rests on melodramatic depictions of exoticism both late antique and modern, and fits well into the picture of intransitive macro-historical substances, such that the Emessan empresses manifested the revenge of the Semites against Graeco-Roman culture. See Kettenhofen, *Syrische Augustae*, 5, 17 f., 75, 121 f., 142 and §§ 1.1 *passim*, 1.3 *passim*, 2.1 *passim*.

¹³³ Cumont is rarely cited in more recent scholarship, and a reasonably comprehensive encyclopaedia account of his work by J. Duchesne-Guillemin ('Cumont, Franz Valéry Marie', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v.) still concentrates on Cumont pressing his conclusions beyond available evidence, and confines the lasting value of his work to his detailed research on Mithraism. There has recently been an altogether more positive revaluation of his entire oeuvre, on which see especially Rochette, 'Cumont', Bonnet, 'Religions orientales', and, earlier, Momigliano, 'From Bachofen to Cumont', esp. 609.

¹³⁴ Rochette, 'Cumont', 60. ¹³⁵ Belayche, 'Deae Syriae', 566, 566 n 3.

¹³⁶ This approach has been described as Droysenian: Bonnet, 'Religions orientales', 187 f., 192 ff.

¹³⁷ Rochet, 'Cumont', 62 f., who decries Cumont's 'extravagant' comparativism, and Bonnet, 'Religions orientales', 186. Bonnet (200) also points out Cumont's distinction between elite and popular religiosity, the latter elevated by metaphysics, which brings Cumont closer to the present concerns of Late Antiquity studies, though this interest of Cumont's seemed geared towards explaining how the Orient might be at once superior and abject – a view close to the *fin de siècle* concern with decadence, the crowd and the 'Ausrottung der Besten' (Bonnet, 'Religions orientales', 196). Thus, for instance, Cumont (*Oriental Religions*, 85 f.): 'the dilettante Hadrian's deification of Antinous' betokened a preference for 'the hieratic rigidity of the barbarian idols to the elegant freedom of Alexandrian art'.

¹³⁸ Martin, 'Cecropian Minerva', 132.

accent was on universality and monarchy, powered by real cultural forces without loyalty to putative origins. In this perspective, the symbolism of normative judgements upon these forces seems irrelevant to the historian concerned with *realia*. Thus it would appear that Cumont's proposition that Galerius (r. 305–311), who sacked Ctesiphon in 299, might be seen to have instituted some kind of Caliphate¹³⁹ would appear to carry a far more suggestive analytical and heuristic significance than the irony suggested by this comparison, a significance of anticipation within the broad context of a development which achieved its classical form under the Caliphate.

In the context of European Philhellenism which marked the whole of the nineteenth century,¹⁴⁰ such a view was surely vexing. Yet, aesthetic and other sensibilities apart, particularly westernising or, earlier, Aryanising sensibilities,¹⁴¹ one would need, for the sake of the historical understanding, to admit such a long view of œcumenical developments, developments for which claims for fast incommensurabilities of East and West are irrelevant, and in which the imperatives of imperial œcumenism override the aesthetic, ideological and other desires and preferences of today. Although this view is, in many ways, a glance backwards from later developments, it is yet one that captures an epochal consistency which, in the actual course of events, is inattentive to symbolic markers of distinctiveness, such as Orient and Occident, the Hellenic and the Semitic, the Orontes and the Tiber.

As a result of this, it would be reasonable to extend the remit of Hellenism – as a phenomenon of linguistic, philosophical, rhetorical, and other forms of cultural, but not ethnic, salience – beyond the age usually designated as Hellenistic and which, in its original usage brought in by Droysen, was still bound to political and dynastic criteria of periodisation, designating the period of Macedonian power, but with broader remit.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Cumont, *Oriental Religions*, 141, not an uncommon idea, stated pregnantly and extended in scope by Spengler (*Decline*, 1.72, 405), who adds that the post-Alexandrian Diadochi 'might indeed have become, insensibly, states of the pre-Arabian spirit' (2.191). See al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 17 ff.

¹⁴⁰ For overall orientations, see Butler, *Tyranny of Greece*, and Jenkyns, *Victorians*. Specifically for Philhellenism and the rise of classical studies, particularly in Germany, see Pfeiffer, *Classical Scholarship*, part 4. Marchand (*German Orientalism*) describes, with limpid erudition, German Philhellenism and reactions to it, called the *furor orientalis*, both of signal significance to European scholarship overall, at chs. 2, 5, and *passim*.

¹⁴¹ Such sensibilities are expressed with particular lyricism by Renan, *Etudes*, 346 f., and Renan to Goldziher, 14 September 1876 (Simon, *Goldziher*, 16). On Renan and the Indo-European/Semitic divide, and on the 'Semitism' of Islam, see Olender, *Languages of Paradise*, ch. 4. Masuzawa, *Invention*, 171 ff. and ch. 6, *passim*, and Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 199 f., 291 ff., 313 ff.

¹⁴² See the fine discussion of Martin, 'Cecropian Minerva', 132 f. Droysen's notion of the Hellenistic age ending with Augustus might be seen to create chronological uncertainties with the employment of this category (Bengston, *Geschichte*, 299 f.). More important, it may well reflect a vague awareness that this periodisation is sustained by a broad vision of œcumenism as the leitmotif of that age, *ipso*

Thus freed of a periodisation based exclusively on ethnic, dynastic or regional designations assigned to particular states, Hellenism would be a serviceable term stretching up much further into history, encompassing Rome as well, beyond the disciplinary boundaries of Greek and Latin classical studies. This would also indicate that the period would need to be seen as highly composite, with constituent elements, political, cultural and otherwise, having different trajectories and *termini ad quo*.

Such an extension in temporal parameters would accommodate Christianity, especially in its central elaborations.¹⁴³ But Christianity apart, which as we saw was also a Roman phenomenon and not entirely 'Semitic',¹⁴⁴ the broader history of which Christianity forms a part is a history of oecumenical empire in the sense outlined above.

One very basic trend governing the imperial history of the region under consideration here is defined by wars between large-scale polities of imperial ambition, albeit not all with an oecumenical vocation, wars whose antique and late antique history from Polybius onwards was written in terms of the universal imperial succession referred to above.¹⁴⁵ This again, like Hellenism, is a very long-term process. The general view held in scholarship overall is of wars between parties, already expressed by ancient Greek historians in terms of Greeks and Persians, motivated by offensive ambitions and

facto connecting it to later ages, thereby creating a conceptual question that prevailing institutions of classical studies and ancient history might consider imponderable, and perhaps unthinkable. See Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 111 f., on chronological problems and imponderables faced by Droysen.

¹⁴³ This is a vast topic on which there is a very substantial bibliography. See, for instance, Pelikan, *Christianity*, 13 ff. and *passim*. The Hellenisation of Christianity in *Altertumswissenschaft* and by a number of Protestant theologians seems inevitably to have had political correlates, on which Flaig, 'Wilamowitz', contradicted by Liebeschuetz, 'Birth', 259 n. 55, and Marchand, *German Orientalism*, ch. 6 and *passim*. But this is not to be taken as an intellectual and historical argument against the extension suggested. That Byzantium was 'much more Biblical than Greek' (Mango, *Byzantium*, 32 – see also especially Mango, 'Discontinuity', 53 ff., Fischer, *Oriens–Occidens*, 7 ff. and Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 174 ff. and *passim*) does not help clarify matters. In contrast, Treadgold ('Break in Byzantium') uses literature, urbanism and other material to argue that the supposed break in Byzantine Hellenism in Byzantium's middle period reflected a discontinuity more in Byzantine studies than in history itself. See the nuanced overall statement by Haldon, *Byzantium*, 329–30 n. 8.

¹⁴⁴ Fischer, *Oriens–Occidens*, 12, 23.

¹⁴⁵ Polybius, *Histories*, 1.2–3. The further elaboration of this theme by Sextus Julius Africanus under Septimius Severus, and the incorporation of Christian salvation history within this scheme by Lactantius and Eusebius, using the Book of Daniel among other texts, is particularly well discussed by Kemp, *Estrangement*, 3 ff. For the importance of the pagan Sybilline Oracles to this Christian scheme, which underlines further the point being made here, and for a different perspective, see Swain, 'Theory of the four monarchies'. Mendels ('Five empires') has questioned Swain's contention that this scheme was of Oriental origin (with the exception of the fourth Sybilline Oracle), maintaining that it emerged in Greek and Roman letters in the second half of the first century BC.

defensive strategies. The parties to this pandramatic vista of contestation are variously labelled as Oriental and Occidental, European and Asiatic, Greek and Persian, Semitic and European, the terms taken at face value and betokening various degrees of exclusiveness and incommensurability, hence of wars between parties defined by a confluence of geography and culture.¹⁴⁶

Only a slight modification of perspective would lead to another interpretation of these incessant wars, beyond the incontestable vainglory involved, and would yield the picture of wars forming a system of 'extraordinary stability',¹⁴⁷ across a region so interconnected that its unification under one imperial signature was not only conceivable to the parties involved, but in objective terms representative of a historical tendency. That the Romans may not generally have wished, as Alexander had, to go beyond the Euphrates, or that Persian ambitions may have been limited in concept, does not lessen the salience of implicit trends that impelled these wars and underlay them.¹⁴⁸

It is in this context that one might appreciate the suggestion of Becker, that a time will come when one would get to understand Late Hellenism, what is here designated as Late Antiquity, looking backwards from Islam.¹⁴⁹ This suggestion amounts to the call for 'writing Islam into late antiquity', and is one that no longer seems unnatural, with the contrary, older position seeming difficult to sustain.¹⁵⁰ That the Arab Muslim empire was 'implicit' in Late Antiquity results from this drive for imperialist consolidation, whose motives were not so much cultural as œcumenical in a far broader sense. Its history goes back to Cyrus and Alexander.¹⁵¹ The toing and

¹⁴⁶ For an account of this martial toing and froing in the late antique period with which we are concerned, see Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia*, esp. part 2, chs. 3 and 4, for wars, diplomacy, treaties and overall chronology. See the interpretation of the geographical and other settings by Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 12 ff., 18, and *Before and after Muhammad*, 2.12 and sources there cited.

¹⁴⁷ Shaw, 'War and violence', 155.

¹⁴⁸ This should not detract from, and may indeed strengthen, the significance of the suggestion that, in 615–616, Khusro had decided that the Roman empire must be liquidated: Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 440. From the reign of Pīrūz (459–484) the Sasanians deployed an Achaemenising mood using Kayanid genealogies, whatever their provenance (Darayee, 'Construction'; Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall*, 335, 385), and through this purveyed the view that they were exacting revenge upon Alexander on behalf of Darius (Boyce, *Letter of Tansar*, 65; Rubin, 'Eastern neighbours', 140).

¹⁴⁹ Becker, *Islamstudien*, 1.201. For the overall cultural conditions and academic setting of Becker's position: Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 363 f.

¹⁵⁰ Cameron, 'Thoughts', 14 f.

¹⁵¹ Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 138 and 7 ff., 10, 21. As Fowden proposes, Alexander needs, in this perspective, to be seen as the last Achaemenid. He required that various realms he subdued or planned to subdue (and these included Arabian polities: Högemann, *Alexander*, *passim*, who

froing of empires, on the Roman side, involved the Near East becoming increasingly central, as suggested above, an erstwhile periphery becoming a central concern of the Roman empire at a time of intense internal stresses.¹⁵² Roman emperors and commanders regularly led campaigns in Syria and across the Tigris from 260–261, and many, including Constantine, received the titles *Persicus* and *Arabicus*.¹⁵³ Sasanian movement towards the west seems to have been intended in the first instance for the supply of labour to maintain the very high irrigation levels required in crucial territories, unprecedented until modern times.¹⁵⁴

In order adequately to come to terms with patterns that might indicate discernible direction rather than one of challenge and response and of strophe and antistrophe between intransitive historical actors,¹⁵⁵ one would need to tackle the underlying forces that are structurally constitutive. This pattern, as has been suggested repeatedly, is empire with an œcumenical and universal vocation, empire expressing itself in the conjugation of territorial dominion and forms of sacral kingship, supposedly of Oriental origin, that are often seen as having sapped, rather than further developed, the energies of the Roman Republic. Subtending this are not only the vainglorious propensities of imperial rule, but other conditions of the economic and military orders as well.

Yet the extension of Rome from a local Italic phenomenon to an œcumenical empire was the universal infrastructure that made possible the universalisation of Hellenism as described above, notwithstanding nominative shifts and imperial ‘translations’.¹⁵⁶ It was the imperial aspect of Hellenistic culture, borne by the Roman empire as its centre of gravity shifted to the east, and as ultimately encapsulated into the early Arab Caliphate and the middle Byzantine empire, that was the defining feature of Late Antiquity:

notes most interestingly, at 20 ff., how geography and Nearchus’ navigation transformed the image of Arabia from that of a Levant, to that of a Peninsula) should offer submission as vassals to the Achaemenid crown, and makes serious military preparations, including operational preparations and tactical innovations appropriate for the terrain and the military habits of the Arabs (chs. 6 and 7), while confining the mythological register of his triumphs to Dionysus and Heracles: Bosworth, *Alexander*, 118 ff., 152 ff.

¹⁵² Millar, *Roman Near East*, 141 f.

¹⁵³ Retsö, *Arabs in Antiquity*, 463, 467. On the other hand, we should remember that there were no major Persian incursions into Roman territory from the 250s until the middle of the sixth century. The activities of both parties were constrained by troubled and insecure peripheries, the Balkans and other parts of Europe for the Romans, the Hephthalites, followed by Turkic peoples, for the Sasanians.

¹⁵⁴ Brown (*Christendom*, 175) describes these as ‘slave-raids on a colossal scale’.

¹⁵⁵ Toynbee, *Study of History*, 1.77 ff., and see Hourani, *Europe*, 68 ff.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Peri, ‘Universalità’, 162, 159.

both are connected to older phenomena, now carried forward, in a specific geographical configuration, by the sweeping, enduring undertow of empire.

From the foregoing discussions, one might reach a number of conclusions pertaining to the physiognomy of Late Antiquity, and to the utility of this historical category both for the period up to 600 and for the interpretation of the Paleo-Islam and the Caliphate that came later. In terms of the sectoral approach suggested above, it emerges that the confluence of two primary sectors is relevant. This was a conjugation of the establishment of an imperial order bearing a political theology of absolute kingship underwritten by scripturalism, with that of œcumenical empire understood as a political centre extending the remit of its control over both sides of the Orient/Occident divide by a variety of means. The system included ideologies of salvific universalism, sustained, as was the case with the Caliphate, by a universal monetary system that lubricated its workings, whose loci consisted of an urban network, and by the merciless exploitation of the countryside.

Both empire and religion were of much older vintage than the one normally understood in studies of Late Antiquity. But in the period *c.* 250–800, they were in confluence, thus acting together as the hinge of the system and as the carriers of its historical direction. Other sectors were at play: formal learning including philosophy and theology, the former persisting much longer, a number of discursive forms, certain governmental institutes and courtly ceremonial, not to speak of *paideia*, later *adab*.¹⁵⁷

What remains to be discussed in terms of these historiographic considerations is the location of Islam within the terms of reference pursued so far. It might be stated again at this stage that less reference in this regard is made to the Sasanians than to the Romans. The reason for this is that, in the context of an empire with a universalising vocation, it was the Roman rather than the Sasanian that highlighted its vocation in terms of a universalist religion. Except for a short period when Shāpūr I (r. 242–272) tried to impose Zoroastrianism on some of his new subjects, centralise Zoroastrian worship and provide it with a scripture,¹⁵⁸ there was little attempt by the Sasanians to create a religio-cultural coherence among their subjects. When in the seventh century Khusro II presided over the largest body of imperial Christian subjects in the world, his attitude to this religion, in line with that of his predecessors, was one of patronage and political management,

¹⁵⁷ On which, see Brown, 'Late antiquity and Islam'.

¹⁵⁸ Rubin, 'Eastern neighbours', 142–3; Boyce, *Letter of Tansar*, 47.

of varying intensity, of the various sects that tore apart the Christians of the Sasanian realm.¹⁵⁹

The location of Islam

In the specialist field of Islamic history, Carl Heinrich Becker wrote famously that 'without Alexander the Great, no Islamic civilisation'.¹⁶⁰ He saw the rise of Islamic civilisation as a response to the Westernisation of the Orient after cultural miscegenation under the Seleucids, a process that was also evident, in his opinion, in the Orientalisation and the Slavisation of Byzantium.¹⁶¹ The earlier migrations of the Arabs out of the Peninsula in the seventh century, followed by the explosive conquests of the Arab 'nomads', a case of an uncontrollable child destroying the parent,¹⁶² were merely the precipitating factors of a long-term process. Following the then-popular theories of ecological determinism used to interpret the Arab conquests, and the conventional contention that these conquests were also a 'nationalist' Semitic response whose earlier forms had been the eastern Myaphysite heresies, a reaction of the Near East against its 'Westernisation',¹⁶³ Becker saw the Arab conquests as the response of the Aramaean East, or what Toynbee termed the Syriac civilisation, to its cultural subjection by Hellenism, which had rendered it what Spengler would have described as a pseudomorph.¹⁶⁴

That Hellenism was an imposition,¹⁶⁵ rather than, as suggested by much of recent Late Antiquity scholarship, a process of gradual, cumulative and, in the final analysis, significant cultural reconfiguration, acculturation and internalisation in an œcumenical setting, tallies well with older trends in historical scholarship. The emphasis on 'imposition' is especially the case in German scholarship, where these themes received their most deliberate elaboration, and were explicitly theorised in terms of a historicist theory of cultural circles, of homeostatic *Kulturkreise*,¹⁶⁶ which today tend to bear

¹⁵⁹ Greatrex, 'Khusro II', 78, 82 f., and *passim*. ¹⁶⁰ Becker, *Islamstudien*, 1.16.

¹⁶¹ Becker, *Islamstudien*, 1.14, and 'Spengler', 262, 265.

¹⁶² Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 119.

¹⁶³ L. Caetani, 'La funzione dell'Islam nell'evoluzione della civiltà', *Scientia*, 11 (1912), 297 f., quoted in Hourani, *Europe*, 59. This has long been a common view which is of course much too oversimplified. See the comments of Dagron, 'Origines', 53.

¹⁶⁴ Spengler (*Decline*, 2.191 f.) considered this pseudomorphism to have started at Actium, where it was 'the unborn Arabian culture that was opposed to iron-grey classical civilization'.

¹⁶⁵ Salient features of this description are outlined by Bowersock, 'Post-imperialist perspective', 88 f., 92.

¹⁶⁶ See Becker, 'Spengler', 262 ff. A leading light was of course Becker's friend Ernst Troeltsch (crucially in Troeltsch, 'Aufbau'). See Johansen, 'Politics and scholarship', 84 f., 88; al-Azmeh, *Times*, 55 ff. and 49 ff. for historical background; Masuzawa, *Invention*, ch. 9. On the emergence of the cultural

the name 'civilisations'. It is for drawing up conceptual concordances and their implications, rather than for purely antiquarian reasons, that the theory of cultural circles is explicitly indicated here. We shall find that, in the final analysis, the interest of Late Antiquity scholarship in, and its dalliance with, Islam was still beholden to more traditional historiographic conceptions, and has generally balked at drawing up the full implications of its considerations of Islam. Such implications may well have caused too many conceptual stresses and imponderables within the institutional paradigm,¹⁶⁷ stresses and imponderables which, after an initial interest, tend to re-exoticise Islam with reference of Late Antiquity.

The theory of cultural circles, implicit or explicit, is highly deterministic.¹⁶⁸ It is one in which historical continuities are redacted in terms of the vexatious concept of origins, with varying degrees of nuance or the lack of such.¹⁶⁹ Just as we find in Toynbee a combined history of civilisations where comparativism, in various measures, and as with Weber, is used for contrastive purposes, so also do we find this contrastive comparativism of combined histories in studies of cultural circles and, in good measure, in recent studies of Late Antiquity.

In between, we have Becker. Although he considered Islam, in terms of a genealogical history, to be based on three 'primal forces' (*Urgewalten*) deriving from the Ancient Orient, Classical Antiquity and Christianity,¹⁷⁰ it is very much to his credit that this view was nuanced. It was nuanced by specifying the field where each of these forces acted, the first in Semitic prophecy, Jewish law, magic, bureaucracy and the absolutist state, the second in daily life, science and art, and the third in dogma, cult and mysticism, all of a type with the West except for the ethnic mix that this involved.¹⁷¹ Becker's nuances are also chronological, uncertain as his

history of Islam in Germany, and for Becker, his relationship to Troeltsch, and the political and ideological factors at play in his scholarship, see van Ess, 'Wellhausen to Becker', *passim* and 46 ff., and Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 361 ff.

¹⁶⁷ Al-Azmeh, *Rom*, 31 f. Unlike the Romans, many scholars of Late Antiquity evince an extreme reluctance to cross the Euphrates: Walker, 'Limits', 50. Also, like the Romans, they have been wary of longer sojourns in that particular neighbourhood.

¹⁶⁸ As noted by Batunsky, 'Becker', 290.

¹⁶⁹ Thus a recent critique of meta-geographical notions of East and West makes the point that the division between Islam and Christendom is 'the shallowest of major divisions . . . in the pre-modern world'. Nevertheless, and with a predictable ambivalence, it regards the distinctiveness of Islam as being so consummate that its civilisation, infused with 'Islamic institutions and practices', is 'the most geographically embracing of all social formations the world has ever seen', whatever that might mean, to the extent that autochthonous Arab Christians are regarded as a 'diaspora': Lewis and Wigen, *Myth*, 146, 148, 153. Thus are vitiated, in this specific case, the many interesting suggestions made by the authors.

¹⁷⁰ Becker, *Islamstudien*, 1.28.

¹⁷¹ Becker, *Islamstudien*, 1.28 f. Cf. van Ess, 'Wellhausen to Becker', 47 n. 116.

chronology may have been, in that he made allowance for change, movement and development in the first centuries of Islam, thus avoiding the very common drift towards regarding Islam as having been complete at birth, and its internal constitution substantively consummated *ab initio*.¹⁷² Finally, Becker's nuances are premised on questioning the common view that the Muslim religion is the determining genetic factor in Islamic history, considering religion to have been only one dimension of social and cultural systems.¹⁷³

Thus Becker viewed Islam as internally differentiated, with none of the model of monolithic correspondence, commonly postulated for Islam, between Book, law, society, culture and polity.¹⁷⁴ But his interpretation remains nevertheless largely genetic, as is every interpretation in terms of what is today termed 'entangled history', constrained, conceptually and contrary to its declared irenic purpose, to a genetic view in which every element brought into entanglement is seen to uphold a fated inner consistency prior to entering into such a relation, and continuing thereafter. The overall terms used in such analyses are generally 'cultural synthesis' and, in religion, 'syncretism'.¹⁷⁵ What this amounts to, in effect, is a history in which the contrasted elements come into what must be an unnatural composition, disintegrating in the fullness of time taken by Muslim civilisation to mature and constitute itself integrally, thereafter the West remaining West, and East remaining East, both reverting to place and to nature.

Thus also the ambiguity, and at times the deep ambivalence, of recent scholarship on Late Antiquity. Peter Brown also proposed a 'hiatus' of 'Bedouin rule' which divided the history, not of Hellenism as with Becker, but of 'a thousand years of civilisation [finding] its voice again',¹⁷⁶ this being the civilisation of Iran. This hiatus ended with Byzantium saving Europe from the Arab naval expeditions of 677 and 717, at which point the

¹⁷² Becker, *Islamstudien*, 1.13 f., and 'Spengler', 261, 265, where he switches to a synchronisation of Antiquity in Byzantium and in Arab domains at around c. 650. Crone and Cook (*Hagarism*, 73, 105 f., 129 and *passim*) give the most exquisite expression of the trope of disjunctive genealogical closure in terms of contrastive comparativism (the latter very well noted in the review of this book by van Ess), with an accent on the uniqueness of Islam in history, on its consummation from its very beginning once it had decided on an 'identity', its prodigious internal coherence, its unflinching introversion, and ultimately its unhappy incoherence, being captive at once to desert and ghetto, to Arabs and Jews, forever mourning a lost past of both Zion and the wilderness. For preliminary comment on the proposition that Islam arose from a *tabula rasa*, and that it constituted an unprecedented break in human history, see Donner, *Narratives*, 294 f., 295 n. 5.

¹⁷³ Becker, *Islamstudien*, 1.3 f.; Johansen, 'Politics and scholarship', 89.

¹⁷⁴ By far the most notable discussion of this persistent theme is still Laroui, 'Arabs and cultural anthropology'.

¹⁷⁵ See the comments of Morony, *Iraq*, 6, and Martin, 'Cecropian Minerva', 136.

¹⁷⁶ Brown, *World*, 200.

Mediterranean, once the centre of the civilised world, became 'the numbed extremity of a great Eurasian empire', experiencing the pull of 'the vast mass of Persia'.¹⁷⁷ This is very much like the Asiatisation, or rather, re-Asiatisation attendant upon the continuation of the Khusroan state of which Becker wrote,¹⁷⁸ an Asiatisation of which the Fertile Crescent was a natural member, this being, in Brown's words, 'a world open at both ends', with Syria looking south rather than towards the Mediterranean,¹⁷⁹ as was her fated wont.

It is to be doubted that work with such meta-historical categories is helpful to historical research and to historical explanation, not least as the appeal to the image of a sunny and hospitable Mediterranean cleft or sequestered by the Arabs' cruel embrace, as is generally understood from the Pirenne thesis, and particularly in trans-Alpine parts marked by more tenebrous climes, is counter-factual.¹⁸⁰ Further, and as scholarship on Late Antiquity places a decided emphasis on religion, it is perfectly natural that the rise of Islam might here be substituted for earlier trans-historical substances – Persia, the East, Semitism – marking divisions and contrasts, in effect incommensurable ones, and wedded to personified geographical divisions. Thus, for one major scholar, it was not so much the demise of towns that marked the terminal end of Late Antiquity, but rather 'the rolling out of Islam'.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Brown, *World*, 200, 202.

¹⁷⁸ Becker, *Islamstudien*, 1.18 f. Brown (*World*, 21, 198) regarded the Abbasid empire as a 'sub-Persian culture', with the Mediterranean as a backwater, signalling 'the irreversible victory of the Near East over the Greeks', and proposed, in a personification of geography, that this happened at a time when the traditions of Greece and Rome, and of the Mediterranean seaboard, 'had to compete with those of the Sassanian empire, of eastern Mesopotamia and the great land-mass of the Iranian plateau'.

¹⁷⁹ Brown, *Christendom*, 169, 178.

¹⁸⁰ The Pirenne thesis is generally understood to go in the same sense. On grounds for believing that it distorts facts, see Lewis, *Naval Power*, 78 ff., who shows that Arab disruption of Mediterranean trade was sporadic and that it did not amount to dislocation, and Ehrenkreuz, 'Remarks', 97, 98 f., 104, who stresses Umayyad insistence on the freedom of maritime trade and interprets the gradual decline of port cities in terms of a more lucrative internal Arab imperial market. Heck (*Charlemagne*, 178 ff.) provides detailed evidence of Arab commerce with the Latin West in the eighth century. See Hodges and Whitehouse, *Mohammed*, *passim*, for wide-ranging archaeological evidence that the 'contraction' of the Mediterranean had been well advanced by the time of the Arab conquests and had been a European phenomenon of which Islamic dominion was the product and not the cause: see Pentz, *Invisible Conquest*, 32 ff., 38, for considerations supported by amphora remains. See also Feldbauer, *Islamische Welt*, 89 ff. and, not least, Brown, 'Mohammed and Charlemagne'. Pirenne himself (*Mohammed and Charlemagne*, 234) had indicated the possible chronological and structural complexity of his own position even in the most quotable formulations of the Pirenne thesis: 'that without Mohammed Charlemagne would not have been conceivable. In the seventh century the ancient Roman Empire had actually become the Empire of the East; the Empire of Charles was the Empire of the West.'

¹⁸¹ Cameron, 'Long' late antiquity', 135.

If we leave aside the counter-factual side of the Pirenne thesis and its silent evocations in late antique studies, and set aside for the moment the 'leap of mind' from symbolic tokens and metaphors of difference, such as religion, to their referent,¹⁸² and try to focus instead on what might be historiographically retrievable from the ambivalences of late antique scholarship, we find that there is much to gain. This is not least the case with regard to Brown's 'hiatus' evoked above, and Becker's concern with chronology, to which we shall return below. For the moment, it will be well to go as much further as the parameters of the present discussion, and as considerations of space, will allow.

That in the sixth century the Roman empire had become Near Eastern¹⁸³ is a matter that has already been discussed. In what sense Brown wished his readers to interpret this statement is not entirely clear, quite apart from the possibility of interpreting 'Near Eastern' as Oriental in the traditional sense, which would have little basis in the argument he proffered. Brown further suggested that the Muslims stepped 'straight into the inheritance of the Byzantine exarchs',¹⁸⁴ and that Muḥammad, the God-fearer, guided his followers by the same considerations as did the Christians and the Jews of the Fertile Crescent, thereby bringing the Arabs 'into civilization as it was known in the seventh-century Near East'.¹⁸⁵

Building upon what Late Antiquity scholarship has to say, albeit only in principle, about geo-cultural heritage, and what it says, again in principle and somewhat imprecisely, about chronology, it will indeed be possible to elaborate a model of historical explanation for the rise of Islam. This will need, crucially, to incorporate the fact of empire, one that does not receive sufficient attention in recent scholarship. It is also a theme whose introduction into the discussion is, on occasion, seen to be a retrograde move by scholarship into more traditional modes of historical discussion which do not allocate to religion and culture the centrality that they are purported to have.¹⁸⁶

In the course of the foregoing review, it has been suggested in many contexts that Islam might be regarded in determinate ways as the consummation of Late Antiquity, the rise of Islam being 'the ultimate consequence of Hellenistic fermentation'.¹⁸⁷ This book intends to give detailed arguments for this thesis. What remains to be done here is to highlight a number of salient features that will be treated in detail later, trying all the while to work beyond chronological uncertainties and beyond general

¹⁸² Cf. Starn, 'Historical decline', 8 f., with respect to another theme where this is operative.

¹⁸³ Brown, *World*, 157 f. ¹⁸⁴ Brown, *World*, 159. ¹⁸⁵ Brown, *World*, 191.

¹⁸⁶ Fowden, 'Contextualizing', 149. ¹⁸⁷ Athanassiadi and Frede, 'Introduction', 3.

statements on synthesis, 'entanglement' or generic distinctiveness, singly or in combination.¹⁸⁸ In all cases, what is proposed is that Islam not be treated from a Graeco-Roman standpoint, which is, as is being suggested, in determinate ways constitutive of Late Antiquity studies' institutional moorings. Further, it is proposed that Islam be seen not 'as an intrusion, as a narrowing of Christendom's eastern and southern horizons', but rather as 'rooted in antiquity, even consummating it'.¹⁸⁹

This rootedness goes beyond the cultivation of letters, which Islamic civilisation knew in very ample measure. It went beyond culture, be it 'high' or 'low'. It went beyond the evocation of Hellenism and its genealogies, which were deployed massively, especially by the Abbasids, building upon what might arguably have been a certain Sasanian Philhellenism during the age of Justinian,¹⁹⁰ as a leitmotif of their cultural continuity with ancient Greece in real as well as ideological opposition to what they regarded as the defunct culture of Rome (the Arabs' designation of Byzantium), become Christian and no longer Hellenic.¹⁹¹ These Hellenic continuities were to persist for a millennium, first in Arabic, later in Persian.¹⁹²

Historical continuities go far beyond evocations of heritage, correlated to origin. The genealogical register of heritages is not in itself an adequate indicator of continuities, which work structurally, often silently and counter-intuitively, and under many guises, despite its indication of the representation of genealogies, themselves often contested in the context of internal cultural differentiations. Unsullied historical virtue and fidelity to origins is most often a charade, albeit one which is constitutive of all traditions, and does not help historical categorisation and periodisation. As one scholar who has carefully probed the notion of tradition put it, it is all too easy to skip from 'as if' descriptions to hypothetical referents.¹⁹³ Profound continuities act, often invisibly, in a variety of distinct historical

¹⁸⁸ As, for instance, with Clover and Humphreys, *Tradition*, 11, 15. Cf. the notion of Islam as an 'intermediate civilization': Goitein, *Studies*, 69 and ch. 2, *passim*.

¹⁸⁹ Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 10 f.

¹⁹⁰ Walker, 'Limits', 60 ff.; Duneau, 'Pénétration de l'hellénisme', 19 f. As for the truth of this ascription of Philhellenism, see Cameron, 'Last days', 18.

¹⁹¹ Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 1 f., 13, 20, 34 ff., 93 f.; al-Azmeh, *Rom*, 36 ff. and see Mas'ūdi, *Murūj*, §§ 741 ff. The depiction of the Sasanian court as 'sub-Byzantine', and the description of the Shah's Shadow as 'half Christian' (Brown, *World*, 169), are most eloquent, and entrancingly suggestive, but not particularly helpful. It would be interesting to consider the Muslim redactions of Greek deities: Walbridge, 'Greek gods', *passim* and 403, where the author suggests that paganism died when Muslim scholars 'looked upon the names of the old gods and did not fear their power'.

¹⁹² On Muslim-Byzantine commonalities, particularly among the *Bildungsschichten*, see the tour de force of von Grunebaum, 'Parallelism', 92 and *passim*.

¹⁹³ Boyer, *Tradition*, 17 and 13 ff.

instances, literary, social, imperial, religious, philosophical and so forth, each with its own temporal rhythms, and dissemble beguiling origins or else deny them.

Crucially, continuity is not understood in this book as a seamless linear movement, in which duration is immobilised and merely stands in as a metaphor for persistence.¹⁹⁴ It is here regarded, rather, as the instantiation of structural possibilities. Heritage, itself multiple rather than singular to the actors concerned, implicit for and recoverable by the historian, is here understood not as origin typologically re-enacted, but rather as a cluster of conditions of possibility. What is being suggested for Late Antiquity is not a history of self-representation, nor one of 'voices', but one that seeks to go beyond these to the structural bases and the consequences of representations. In this perspective, 'voices' become not so much guides to historical interpretation as objects of such.

Beyond the issues discussed above, little systematic and detailed work has been done on linear continuities and discontinuities, some declared and others implicit, between Islam and Late Antiquity. But the material is gathering force and it can achieve a critical mass when regarded in systematic compass.¹⁹⁵ There is relevant work on material, institutional, religious and economic organisation, based on patient study of literary sources in the relevant languages, no less than the study of epigraphy, numismatics, pottery, architecture and other aspects of material culture.¹⁹⁶ There is some detailed work on economic and monetary history,¹⁹⁷ a plentiful amount on art history,¹⁹⁸ urbanism,¹⁹⁹ religious representations²⁰⁰ and political representations,²⁰¹ and much on intellectual history, especially philosophy. Equally important, it has been suggested, in some detail, that a temper of violent piety is a constitutive element in the life of late antique empires

¹⁹⁴ Cf. the limpid analysis of Bachelard, *Dialectique*, 52 f.

¹⁹⁵ For a masterly and comprehensive review of the present state of scholarship, see now Cameron, 'Introduction'.

¹⁹⁶ Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria*; Morony, *Iraq; Material Culture*. See now Ballian, 'Country estates', Moraitou, 'Ornamental motifs', and Ballian's articles on Umayyad palaces in *Byzantium and Islam*, 209 ff., and Foote, 'Abbasid residence'.

¹⁹⁷ Excellent examples are Lombard, *Monnaies*, and Cahen, 'Histoire économique-social'.

¹⁹⁸ I cite, almost at random, Allen, 'Arabesque', Flood, *Great Mosque*, and Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra*. This has recently been shown in full splendour in an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: *Byzantium and Islam*.

¹⁹⁹ Ju'ayt, *al-Kūfa*, 110 ff., 160 ff.; Kennedy, 'Polis to Medina'; 'Last century'; Foss, 'Syria in transition'; Cahen, 'Mouvements populaires'. On the contrasting picture of Byzantine cities between the seventh and ninth centuries, Haldon, *Byzantium*, 96 ff., 110 f., 112 ff., and cf. Randsborg, *First Millennium*, 168 ff.

²⁰⁰ Most notably, Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*.

²⁰¹ Al-Azmeh, *Kingship*.

from the fourth century, with Constantinople and Damascus sharing ‘dangerously charged affinities’.²⁰²

It is being suggested in this book that Islam forms an integral part of Late Antiquity, as a period defined both chronologically and with structural specification relative to each instance of this unit. Chief among these, and the binding, propulsive element, is empire. But there are others, as suggested: the economy, art, religion and other fields of human activity, each of which has its own, internally differentiated tempo of conservation and of change. Empire, once Arab and later Muslim, is taken into account meaningfully as the overarching instance, over-determining the others in terms of capacity, tempo and substantive inflection. Late antique empire in its Arab Paleo-Muslim and, later, Muslim moments is not simply in linear continuity with structures previously existing, although there is evidence of much linear movement from imperial traditions of rule in place, the paradigmatic one of which was the Roman, with the Persian a source of certain administrative rules and elements of statecraft under both Umayyads and Abbasids.²⁰³ The accent on Rome is intended to lend the substance of historical continuity to the name it carried in a later, late antique phase, and the crucial elaboration of the political theology of a salvific œcumenical polity.

Empire implied both God and Mammon, and the late antique imperial state in between, Roman and Arab, mediated the two, holding them together by their capacity for action and making the latter available to the former. Late antique empire worked with the imperial development of monotheism, which is a major constituent element of the picture in so far as Islam became an imperial religion that is not likely to have persisted without empire. Mammon, in the shape of a new œcumenical currency, the *dīnār*, signalled the unification of the gold and silver zones of the Byzantines and the Sasanians, and made possible the durability both of empire and of the communication and acculturation infrastructures underlying its elaboration of a world religion. It powered an empire based on strings of intense urbanism, fuelled by international trade,²⁰⁴ and was highly monetarised.²⁰⁵ Ecumenical currency is a token of œcumenical sovereignty and, in this

²⁰² Sizgorich, *Violence*, 36 ff., 145.

²⁰³ Kaegi (‘Variable rates’, *passim*) discusses changes in the Byzantine administrative structure following the Arab invasions, which, on a recent estimate, suffered as a result losses in revenue of the order of 75 per cent (Haldon, *Byzantium*, 10).

²⁰⁴ It would be interesting to contrast the positive attitude of Muslims to trade with the disdain of Byzantines: Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, 39 f.

²⁰⁵ The most systematic and compelling picture to date is given by Lombard, *Golden Age*, part 1. For monetary recession and expansion, see Morony, ‘Economic boundaries’, 170 ff., 184.

as in many other cases, an imperial signature. All this calls for a study of numismatic history. Both these histories, that of God and that of Mammon, will be offered in chapters to come, albeit in very different measures, the former amply and the latter restrictively.

It has been suggested that the formative period of the Arab-Muslim empire, sometimes seen to stretch to c. 900,²⁰⁶ was followed by the *Völkerwanderung* between c. 975 and 1275, at the end of which 'Islamic society', 'as it is known today', came to be.²⁰⁷ Periodisation is not among the strengths of studies on Muslim history, generally following dynastic rhythms, and there is no counterpart here to the vigorous parleys on periodisation and categorisation discussed above, with one notable exception.²⁰⁸ There has generally been a lack of clarity in differentiating chronology from periodisation,²⁰⁹ and often a confusion between the two.

It will be suggested in what follows that the Paleo-Muslim empire of the Umayyads was, in many crucial respects, in linear continuity with the earlier ones in place, but with greater geographical extent. The accent on geography proposed above gives much sense to the way in which Paleo-Muslims galvanised what had in many ways become very much the core region of the late Roman empire, and were in their turn galvanised, and indeed launched, by it. While Barbarian Germanic invaders are most often seen, with the possible exception of the Ostrogoths, as having sapped away the capacity and the constitution of the Roman empire, Barbarian Arab invaders gave it added capacity and vigour, greater geographical extension, and a fresh lease of life, albeit under a novel and unexpected signature. The Arab empires were in continuity with Rome in terms of their notion of a monotheistic world religion, in their œcumenical vocations, and in a variety of other senses as well, including culture. All of these were appropriated, selectively, as from an inventory of possibilities 'decanted' in Late Antiquity, and instantiated under a new signature, Arabic in language and Muslim in religion.

²⁰⁶ Clover and Humphreys, *Tradition*, 11 – but note that, with habitual chronological ambiguity and conceptual uncertainty, the authors speak, somewhat equivocally, of the 'internalisation' of Romanity by the Muslims by the ninth century only (13 ff.), Romanity here being understood, one would presume, as designating the Hellenic philosophical heritage.

²⁰⁷ Toynbee, *Study of History*, 16.

²⁰⁸ Morony, 'Bayn al-Fitnatayn', *passim*, where the author suggests that, instead of a dynastic periodisation, one would need to take into account the differential rhythms, or what he calls 'multiple schemes', of internal control and expansion, administrative centralisation and decentralisation, and, crucially for earlier periods, the dialectic of imperial elite and Arab warrior caste.

²⁰⁹ For instance, by one of the best historians of Islam, the fairly arbitrary periods of classical (700–1000), High Middle Ages (1000–1250), Late Middle Ages (1250–1500), Period of the Three Empires (1500–1800): Hodgson, *Venture*.

It will be suggested, further, that what eventually became the Muslim religion grew out of the paganism of a very marginal area, western and central Arabia, in a manner that had been familiar in an earlier transition towards universal monotheism. When discussing a familiar process, it is not the intention of this book to speak of diffusion and of borrowing, although these did occur. In contrast to the diffusionist model often provided for the explanation for the genesis of the Muslim religion, and its search for constitutive origins in previous monotheistic religions or in more generally Semitic terms,²¹⁰ the model here adopted is polygenetic, with an emphasis on local and autochthonous forces and processes which, once their geographical and social remit had widened under imperial auspices, joined a historical flow that had already been firmly in place, and realised, under central control, a number of possibilities available in the structures of polytheism, as had been the case before.

This process took time, over the century here characterised as Paleo-Muslim, for its elaboration and for acquiring minimal coherence and the capacity for self-reproduction and self-perpetuation, eventually and, in the fullness of time, becoming a Great Muslim Tradition.

Western Arabia of c. 600 was an anachronism.²¹¹ In terms of religious history, it was not contemporary with surrounding territories between which it was wedged. It was a pagan reservation that had been largely passed over by developments occurring elsewhere, and was in a real sense historically retarded with respect to surrounding areas, retardation being understood in terms of the historical dynamics of *Verzeitlichung*, temporalisation, and shorn of its normative connotation.²¹² When speaking of the unevenness of œcumenism, retardation and archaism are perfectly respectable notions to work with, having a closer degree of verisimilitude than more squeamish terms. But it must be emphasised that it is not 'survivals' that are studied under the title of archaism, but rather a tenacious traditionalism still very much alive,²¹³ and one which, like traditionalism overall, was a specific form of representing change, whereby actual or apparent repetition is construed as conservation.²¹⁴

²¹⁰ This last tallies well with Pan-Babylonianism discussed already, treating a total system with explanatory value and causal salience: Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 26.

²¹¹ Cf. the notion of *Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigen*: Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 94 and *passim*.

²¹² On the notion of *Verzeitlichung*, see Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 5 ff., 140 ff.

²¹³ See Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, 409, for pertinent comments on the notion of 'survivals' being almost an admission of defeat before the tasks of historical interpretation.

²¹⁴ Contrary to the implicit causal hypothesis held by many anthropologists, that cultural models cause actual behaviour, it must be noted that conservation is not so much an actual observed quality of events but rather a hypothesis put forward to account for what appears as repetition: Boyer, *Tradition*, 2, 10, and see also 30 ff., 37.

With the centralisation and consolidation of the Paleo-Muslim cult of Allāh, it might be said that Paleo-Islam in its Arabian phase constituted a major event of universal salience, but not a unique event in world history. This was an event of relatively short duration and low probability which, having moved itself to Syria and Mesopotamia, saw itself propelled to the position of a global force with a transformative impact. The theological and cultic centralisation of the erstwhile Arabian paganism of west Arabian laggards, which became Paleo-Islam, was achieved rapidly and in compact socio-political and geographical compass. Militarily powered, this religion of an external proletariat came to be immediately transposed, by empire in Damascus and Baghdad, to the most advanced terminus reached by Hellenistic political theology in which the one universal empire mirrored the one God.

It was thus that the microcosmic and elementary re-enactment of the œcumenical late antique move from henotheism and monolatry to monotheism took place among the Arabs. This led to the temporalisation of west Arabian Arabs, their fuller insertion within the overall historical direction of Late Antiquity, into the historical amplitude of long-term trends, becoming the point of arrival of 'Constantine's dream' – or perhaps rather that of Eusebius. It is thus that another dream might be fulfilled, that of Becker, that we might be able to understand Late Antiquity by looking back from the Arab empire of the Umayyads.

History and comparativism

It may be noted that periodisation is also a form of comparativism. This involves the diachronic comparison of successive units identified by names. Linear continuities between late antique empires discussed here there certainly were, and amply. Such linear continuities as existed are here regarded from a perspective which is less genetic than structural, of a kind that may, in some instances discussed below, particularly those relating to religion, be termed Frazerian. This is based on the assumption that general phenomena must have equally general causes. Unlike Frazer, however, the following discussions will draw analogies that are not decontextualised, with no evolutionist assumptions, without Frazer's cognitive or intellectualistic assumptions,²¹⁵ or the blind alleys into which he pursued otherwise cogent anthropological theses.²¹⁶ Whatever Frazerianism may be perceived

²¹⁵ See Frankfort, *Problem of Similarity*, 3 ff.; Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen*, 4 ff.

²¹⁶ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 19.

in the following pages will be shackled by location and chronology, in short by history, without a denial of broad anthropological purchase in many cases. In this perspective, the linear, genetic template is a determinate aspect of more general comparability.

One will need to specify levels of generality and of detail at which comparisons and continuities are considered. A very high level of generality at which human universals operate by instantiation – and these comprise not only language, but also government and religion, which are crucial for the arguments to follow²¹⁷ – will not be denied by anyone. But the comparison between Islam and Late Antiquity will rarely operate at this level of generality. Systematic and detailed attention to extremely wide-ranging structural assonances in which variants are interpreted in terms of isomorphy, often a risky undertaking, has on occasion yielded extraordinarily fruitful and convincing results.²¹⁸ Rather, emphasis will be placed on a fixed pool of historical possibilities, variously inflected, first in Paleo-Muslim Arabia, later in the central lands of the Caliphate both before and after *c.* 650. The conceptual tools used will refer more to what are widely known, after Robert Merton, as ‘middle-range theories’, integrating theory with empirical research to explore generic features of phenomena studied by means that go beyond empirical generalisation.

Thus various elements in linear continuity studied in this book – such as political theology and monotheism – will work with common elements existing in both periods here postulated, but without implying fixed combinations or outcomes, and by treating similar features as distinct and distinctive in their respective settings,²¹⁹ without this implying a contrastive comparativism. This comparativist model, then, while building upon genetic connections, will inflect perspectives of linear continuity away from confinement to conditions of filiation which might imply inevitability, to the

²¹⁷ Brown (*Human Universals*, 44 ff. and *passim*) proposes most convincingly a classification that comprises the whole range from small-scale statistical universals, traits or complexes of traits more widespread than chance alone can account for (such as using the expression ‘littleperson’ for the pupil of the eye), to conditional or implicational universals, important for historical explanation, and unconditional universals, taking in a universally fixed pool of elements, such as phonemic systems, semantic elements that structure kinship, and universal models and frameworks comprising kinship, family, government and religion.

²¹⁸ An almost revelatory case in point is Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, pp. 266 ff. and *passim*, on the witches’ Sabbath. It might be recalled that folk narratives and other genres, including the legend, of relevance to some discussions to follow below and of determinate salience to all considerations of tradition, do have a finite number of formal constants of universal validity. Scholarship on this matter is substantial, and I will rest content here with referring the reader to one fundamental account of these constants and of their manner of transformation over time and space: Propp, ‘Transformations’, 56 f., 59 ff. Other, more specific items will be cited in due course.

²¹⁹ Cf. Frankfort, *Problem of Similarity*, 7, 21.

messier and very uneven considerations of the concrete history of concrete elements, thus foreclosing notions of homeostasis so common in large-scale historical comparisons that we have seen.²²⁰ This view also works against assumptions of seamless transition, and against the logic of repetition and of typological pseudocausation that besets many investigations of historical continuity.²²¹

This view corresponds to that so strikingly expressed by Wittgenstein in his metaphor of the relationship between the circle and the ellipse. He stated that although a circle might be modified into the shape of an ellipse, this does not imply that the latter arose from the former.²²² The comparisons proposed will be structural, based on correspondences between elements belonging to a temporal series of structures (mainly late antique and Paleo-Muslim religious and political life) that are not closed. This makes way for the middle range of elements at once empirical and historical, allowing for the generic to replace the typological, and facilitating a comparativism that clarifies and controls the analysis of specific issues in a broadly anthropological perspective, referring correspondences both to a common historical patrimony and to broader anthropological constants.²²³ It is such a procedure, as we shall see later in this book, that makes for the thesis suggested concerning the polygenetic emergence of Paleo-Islam in a manner parallel to those of Christianity and Judaism, rather than as a phenomenon arising by epigonic diffusion from these religions, although consideration of diffusion will not and cannot be neglected.

Thus, it is hoped, the treatment of the emergence of Paleo-Islam and Islam in the context of Late Antiquity will be able to avoid the assumptions of structural closure and homeostasis assumed by notions of 'cultural synthesis', with their simplistic and heterogenetic emphasis on influence and borrowing of discrete elements, and their orthogenetic assumptions that account for the final product.²²⁴ In other words, the analysis proposed

²²⁰ Needham, 'Polythetic classification', a very widely quoted essay, proposes a notion of 'polythetic classification', akin to Wittgenstein's 'family resemblances', in which classed events refer to a set of properties which are possessed by a large number of members of each class but not possessed by all individuals of the aggregate. Implicit in 'family resemblance' is of course a certain vagueness. If deployed controllably, it can be made to serve work in the context of middle-range theories deployed here. Arab polytheism will be seen as an excellent case in point.

²²¹ It has been suggested that the contrastive comparativism implicit in those accounts of history which distrust macro-level generalisations and are usually content with purely chronological accounts lend themselves to the intrusion of unstated theoretical explanations and, when actively engaged in comparison, can be overly repetitive without commensurate methodological gain: Skopcol and Somers, 'Comparative history', 191 ff.

²²² Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen*, 9.

²²³ Cf. Dumézil, *Héritage*, 34 ff., 42; Vernant, *Religions*, 36 f., 41.

²²⁴ Morony, *Iraq*, 5 f., 19.

will not be morphological, working with overarching categories such as 'civilisation'.²²⁵ Further, the discussions to follow will treat linear continuity not on an assumption of inertia, which seems to be inherent in studies of historical continuity,²²⁶ but in a way that enriches linear continuity at once with a broader anthropological range and a detailed empirical base. In time and place we shall have a concrete frame of reference that could take us beyond the runaway names of Islam or of Late Antiquity, their convenience notwithstanding. Historical emergence and its conditions, generally termed context, do not undermine generalisation nor do they inhibit comparisons or contrasts,²²⁷ if the constituents of the contexts compared take on the general aspect imparted by middle-range terms of comparison.

Put more concretely after these general and rather abstract statements, Islam and Late Antiquity will be treated both in sequence and synchronically, in terms of certain of their structural features. More concretely still, the middle-range terms of comparison will be undertaken in terms of categories at once general and empirically specific, namely, divinity, cult, scripture, community (however defined, and whatever its extent), government and œcumenism.

Strictly speaking, there can be no such thing as Islamic history. There is no history for which the denomination 'Islam' would make sense with any measure of adequacy,²²⁸ or for which it might be seen to act as an interpretative or otherwise explanatory or causal grid. There are histories of Islamic theology, cult, and much else that might adequately be deemed objects of historical study, and there is of course a history of Paleo-Islam as a religious and political movement forming a crucial part of this book. But Islam is not in itself a historical subject, nor could its indeterminacy allow its construal as an object of historical study or a category of the historical understanding. To treat it as such would be to deploy a *chronotopos* rhetorically, rather than a historical concept,²²⁹ to regard it as a historical figure

²²⁵ Smith (*Imagining Religion*, 22 ff.) proposes a limpid, fourfold classification of comparativist procedures (ethnographic, encyclopaedic, morphological and evolutionary) – the morphological is treated at 23 f.

²²⁶ Morony, *Iraq*, 507. ²²⁷ Burke, 'Context', 172 f. and *passim*.

²²⁸ One should heed Albert Hourani's gentle warning that 'words like Islamic history do not mean the same things in different contexts . . . in no context are they enough in themselves to explain all that exists. In other words, "Islam" and the terms derived from it are "ideal types", to be used subtly, with infinite reservations and adjustments of meaning, and in conjunction with other ideal types, if they are to serve as principles of historical explanation.' He adds with approval, as a corrective, the suggestion made by Claude Cahen, that historical categorisation in terms of concrete geographical or temporal qualifiers such as medieval, pre-industrial, Mediterranean or Near Eastern would be far more adequate than 'Islamic': Hourani, 'History', 117.

²²⁹ Al-Azmeh, *Times of History*, 187 ff. (it is worth indicating that this notion bears little relation to that of 'chronotope' developed by Bakhtin, *Dialogical Imagination*, 84). A chronotopic treatment

‘in’ which events recur on an assumption of repeatability and identity,²³⁰ rather than a historical object. This book concerns specific times and places in which the Paleo-Muslim religion arose, became dominant, and came to develop into what we know as Islam: a history in Late Antiquity.

The refusal – or reluctance – to subject matters Islamic to comparative perspectives in history at large, and in the history of religion in particular, is long established. It has a connection with reluctance to apply anthropological and comparative religious studies to monotheistic religions, and with the overdrawing in historical philology of a narrow notion of contextualisation and of claims to uniqueness.²³¹ Such a reluctance was expressed in the nineteenth century in terms of contrast between the Semitic and the Indo-European/Aryan, where the former was said to lack myth and to have other inherent characteristics as well.²³² This attracted an early rebuttal from Goldziher,²³³ at least with regard to Judaism,²³⁴ on the grounds of being an invalid group-psychological schematism, in contrast to the requirements of a more general scheme of human development overall.²³⁵ Goldziher’s anthropological approximations are evident throughout his work, but he was the first to respond fully by affirming the existence of a mythology among the Hebrews, on the assumption that no race is devoid of myth, a general psychological phenomenon connected, after the manner

of Islamic history, not unnaturally but nevertheless oddly for a work of history, removes it from the consideration of matters such as the economy and technology that are, in contrast to ‘culture’ and religion, not signs of distinctiveness: Lapidus, *History*, xxiii.

²³⁰ For this and other aspects and modes of temporal extension, see above all Koselleck, ‘Geschichte, Geschichten’.

²³¹ The reluctance to subject ancient Judaism to anthropological comparativism in these terms (and these have parallels in the study of Islam) has been discussed in detail recently: Eilberg-Schwartz, *Savage*, 7 ff., 15, and ch. 4, *passim*. For Christianity, see the comments of Leach, ‘Virgin birth’. A similar reluctance had also been in evidence in scholarship on ancient Greece. In this field, the anthropological and comparativist, history of religions line of investigation inaugurated by Usener, and pursued by a group of influential students, has for long been countered by an orientation, inaugurated by Wilamowitz and officiated in the name of his authority, which preferred a narrower approach to philology and a loftier conception of ancient Greece that would distance it from the superstitions of savages: see Schlesier, *Kulte*, 210 ff., 315, and *passim* for a study of the theme in international scholarship.

²³² Renan’s famous claim that the Semites lacked mythology was early on contested in a rather temperate pamphlet by Max Müller (Müller, *Reply*, 27 ff.).

²³³ See Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 327 f. This view brought the derision of Wellhausen: Rudolph, ‘Wellhausen’, 127.

²³⁴ It is interesting to note that the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, a body of work and an atmosphere with which Goldziher had decided affinities, led to a more positive evaluation of Islam (see more generally Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 113 ff.). Yet this was an evaluation that was still bound to prevalent notions of Semitism from which Judaism was to be exempted, such that one founding father of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Abraham Geiger, still regarded the Qur’an, positively, as derivative of Judaism (Heschel, ‘Abraham Geiger’, 72, 75 ff.).

²³⁵ Goldziher, *Renan*, 38 f.

of Tylor, to a particular stage in human development.²³⁶ More recently, the reluctance to subject Islam to comparative study has been noted, all the while and indirectly giving it justification by the widespread notion that Islam is 'not notably rich' in myth, cultic development, symbolism or sacral kingship.²³⁷

In a way, this appeal to comparativism would close the circle, by returning us, hopefully wiser and aware of the pitfalls as well as the merits of the much derided Frazerian model, to the largesse of spirit and comparative remit practised, often in a profligate baroque manner, by nineteenth-century scholars. The long nineteenth century, and particularly its ethnography and philology, were comparativist by origin and vocation, and certainly by academic training. Some scholars admitted the comparability of Islam to Semitic religions and ethnological settings,²³⁸ intermittently using the findings of Biblical archaeology, and dwelt at length on the derivation of Islam from Judaism or Christianity. That this comparativism was also classificatory, ethnologically and temporally, and that its systems of classification were normative and hierarchical, and often operated contrastively, matters little in analytical terms.

²³⁶ Goldziher, *Mythos*, x, xv, a move interpreted (Olender, *Languages*, ch. 8), in the conceptual equipment of his time and in line with the motifs of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, as construing the Semites as Aryans. I would add that this Aryanisation of the Semites must in this case be seen to have been confined to the Jews. Goldziher regarded the Arabs, in a manner reminiscent of Renan on the Semites, as having no conceptions of history, no myth and little metaphysics (Goldziher to Nöldeke, 26 June 1896 and 18 May 1907, in Simon, *Goldziher*, letters 18 and 46, pp. 217, 301).

²³⁷ Adams, 'History of religions', 182 and *passim*.

²³⁸ For instance, Nöldeke, review of Wellhausen, *Reste*, 718, and Lyall, 'Relation', 254, 256 f.

Gods, divine economies and emperors

This chapter will develop the point made in the previous one about the long duration of religious phenomena, in this case reaching back from late Rome to ancient Rome, Greece and the Near East. It starts with some general considerations on deities, divine names and cults, before offering an interpretation of antique and late antique religion salient to the political and theological transitions to monotheism. In a sense, what is being offered is geared to disengaging a number of themes crucial to the genesis of Allāh, and might well be described as a generic pre-history of a historical development of religion, cultic as well as socio-political, whereby a specific deity came to emerge as singular, encompassing all the epithets and functions of divinity, particularly but not exclusively in the Roman and late antique Near East. A comparative approach such as the one proposed seeks concordances, always incomplete, in which overlapping common features figure as particular instantiations of more general phenomena.¹

Concretely, what is intended here is to highlight matters pertaining to cult in a generic sense, understood as communal worship, invocation, propitiation and supplication in set times and places, and to underline a number of general features shared by divine names deployed in the process: personal names, proper names, as well as functional, epithetic and epicletic names (names used in invocation). All of these are together involved in syncretism, which needs to be characterised with rather more complexity than as a mixture of elements of different origins. Syncretism might be defined initially as a pattern of relationships of association, assimilation, superordination and subordination among deities, considered both as sublime energies and as common and proper names, this constituting a major structural feature of polytheism. In this sense, the notion of syncretism might be understood in a more useful and workable way than as simply a

¹ Cf. Needham, 'Polythetic classification', 350, with different emphases.

medley of heterogeneous elements, and comes to be regarded as a coherent system.²

Cult, syncretism and theonyms are involved together in the emergence of monolatry, henotheism and monotheism – all distinct phenomena, not necessarily constituting processes of transition between the one and the other – in polytheistic settings. All were structural aspects of polytheism, and all were active in the fashioning of Allāh, such that, like other deities emerging from the structures of polytheism, Allāh may be said to have been conceptually implicit in late antique religious developments.

The history of a deity, including the Christian *ho theos*, Deus, Alāha (Aramaic) and Allāh and Lāh (Arabic), the Israelite, later Jewish Adonai, Elohīm (the Biblical *ho theos*) and Yahweh (the Biblical Kyrios), and the Paleo-Muslim and later Muslim Allāh and al-Raḥmān, might be conceived, formulated and written in a variety of ways.³

For the purposes of the present investigation, two registers are of special pertinence. The first is generic. A generic history of a supreme deity, including Allāh, would consider in comparative compass the rise to primacy, eventually to indivisible divine remit, of one among deities emerging from a polytheistic universe to attain exclusive and indivisible divine status, in a movement that was to be recapitulated structurally in the Paleo-Muslim period of Muḥammad and his immediate successors. And while Israelite religion had been recast, however uncertainly at first, in the monotheistic mode around the sixth century BC, its canon came later; Christians, for their part, generated an uncertain monotheism against the background of societies and empires that had used the advanced conceptual means of Hellenistic philosophy and theology, to conceive deity. In both cases, and in Paleo-Islam as well, conceptual and cultic structures of polytheistic syncretism were deployed to generate an idea of exclusive divinity and of an exclusive cult, made possible and underwritten by factors of the social and political order.

The second register is more specific to place and time. With regard to Allāh, this register concerns conditions and developments in the area which, in the late sixth and the seventh centuries, saw the emergence of

² Cf. Martin, 'Cecropian Minerva', 136, 139.

³ Etymology apart, that the names of great gods that were to become the monotheistic deities have decided morphological kinship in their respective language families is striking, and is worthy of explanation. Thus the Latin *deus* (and its derivatives in Romance languages), the Greek *theos*, the Sanskrit *deva*, the Russian *divo*, are all related to the Proto-Indo-European **deiwo*s. The English and Dutch *god* and its cognates in Germanic languages are related to the Proto-German **gutham* and the Proto-Indo-European **ghut* or **ghuto*; ancient Germans used **ansuz* for their highest deities, *Gott* being elevated with conversion to Christianity. The Semitic 'l, 'lh and *yhwh* will be discussed later.

Paleo-Islam – namely, west, east and north-western Arabia. This was an area that, in the late sixth century, still saw the persistence of a generic polytheism, forming a series of geographical and religious enclaves of Arab polytheism alongside a variety of Christian, Jewish and, possibly, Judaeo-Christian denominations and conceptions, so far of uncertain physiognomy. Both polytheism and ambient monotheisms were equally pertinent to the emergence of Allāh as a monotheistic deity: the former pertinent to the religious transformation of the pagan Arabs, in some ways analogously to the cultic transformations of Israelite religion to Judaism.

This chapter will start with a consideration of some basic religion-historical concepts used in what follows, with emphasis on constant, structural patterns, the purpose of the discussion being a general description and analysis of empirical material rather than a historical narrative. It will go on to describe, in these terms, a historical dynamic that yielded monotheism and its relation to imperial power.

Cults and theonyms

In his polemic against Christianity, Porphyry of Tyre (d. c. 305) wondered why Christians indulged in what he regarded as the absurd argument over the names to be given to a particular deity. It is incontestable, he maintained, that the Greek Athena was the Roman Minerva, and that this goddess had different names in Thrace, Syria and Egypt. Apart from the name, he argued, deities are by nature the same, and it makes little difference, moreover, were they to be called gods or angels.⁴ Matters pertaining to divinity had always fared this way in the imperial *oecumene* of Hellenistic and late antique universalism, and long before. From the third millennium BC, dictionaries of divine equivalences between the Sumerian, Akkadian and, later, Ammorite, Kassite, Elamite and Hurrian deities existed. This expressed an ‘intercultural theology’ with implications for international law, sustaining treaties which involved curses and oaths by gods who needed to be mutually accredited between different parties to ancient treaties.⁵ It was a considerable historical achievement of polytheism that it facilitated the creation of such a common semantic and conceptual universe.

⁴ Text in Hoffmann, *Porphyry*, 84.

⁵ Assmann, *Moses*, 45 ff. Mesopotamian treaties had the particular refinement of allocating specific curses by separate deities that might be inflicted upon those who break treaties: Weeks, *Admonition*, 54.

This universe was premised upon the transitive nature of divinity, conceived as a form of energy that could move out of local cults and acquire a geographical and social remit of operation broader than the local. These last arise from various forms of cultural and political dilation, eventually of imperial expansion, accompanied by cultic and cultural centralisation, or at least the erection of leagues or confederations of divinities residing in a specific cultic location, as was the case in ancient Nippur, a city without a discernible political role in the city-state system of Mesopotamia.⁶ The distinction between political and symbolic centres, secular or religious, confederated or dedicated to a particular chief divinity with trans-local drawing power, is ubiquitous;⁷ one would need to think only of Delphi, Baalbek, Hierapolis and Mecca. The trans-local, it must be stressed, does not usually suppress the local; under conditions of weaker connection, the mutual convertibility of local deities is the rule.

In all cases, the primary mechanism of syncretism, incorporation and centralisation at the concrete, local points of application is cultic, being a form of devotion to a deity by determinate social groups in a specific location and according to a formal order of rites (ceremonial words and actions), commonly repeated according to a ritual calendar, without these cultic rites necessarily reflecting a formal theology.⁸ The prominence of a particular trans-local cultic location is directly comparable to variations in 'the intensity of forces that bind complex regions together'.⁹ If cultic religion as a practice be regarded from its concrete points of application, one would need to see hierarchy and domination as ultimately leading not only to a cultic coherence, but, if durable, to a theological coherence as well. This, in a certain sense, was the historical direction of the axial age.¹⁰

In an age which preceded the formulation and, ultimately, the institutionalisation of scripturalist doxographies, and indeed in ages, like that of Late Antiquity, during which these were still emergent, the focus of attention would seem to be directed more appropriately to cultic practices than to elaborate theological beliefs, if we are to understand religion at its *point of application*: this is an expression that will be used often in what follows, to refer to the concrete and formal expression of the relationship between deity and votary or a determinate body of votaries, however mediated. In

⁶ Bottéro, *Mésopotamie*, 385 and the more general considerations of Gladigow, 'Strukturprobleme', 297.

⁷ Eisenstadt, *Political Systems*, 61.

⁸ I generally follow the non-intellectualistic approach to ritual, well expressed in Tambiah, 'Approach', 119 and *passim*.

⁹ Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, 446, with reference to rhythms of Mediterranean pilgrimage.

¹⁰ Gauchet, *Désenchantement*, 22, 28 ff.

all, cultic practices are directed more to propitiation and supplication, to the offer of blandishments in the form of sacrifices and vows, to magical 'coercion',¹¹ and to appeasement in between, than to the abstract worship and devotion that is carried beyond specific moments of worship or of need, a phenomenon usually termed piety. Primary attention to exclusive devotion to a deity would be anachronistic, in addition to being modelled upon the later history of Christianity,¹² and of Islam, for, in the final analysis, polytheistic cult is the site of 'ritualised exchange'.¹³

Moreover, the language of cultic enunciation involves more the litany, invocation and hymn than the creed, unless we take divine epithets and epicleses such as Saviour, Thunderer, Merciful or Vengeful as abbreviations of credal items, which they can be under specific conditions of religious organisation, but are not necessarily so except for the few with the duty, will or capacity to go beyond the symbolic to the metaphysical. It would not be reasonable to suppose that a Calabrian peasant taking communion is likely to be reflecting upon notions of essence and hypostasis.¹⁴

It would seem appropriate to direct one's attention to the more immediate kratophanies manifested by deities, to their manifestations of uncanny energy – their capacities for providing rain, healing, prophecy, progeny, triumph in war, success in business, or alternatively their power to thwart, to curse, and to cause disease and death – rather than to focus on the allocation of 'semantic values' to deities¹⁵ as might be imparted by mythographies or theologies. Speaking of kratophany does not imply any partiality to the view, common from the time of the Enlightenment, that religion represents some primal fear before the uncertainty of nature and of human life in general; and I am not partial to folk-psychologistic phenomenologies of religious experience, but prefer to start from religion as a form of communal practice. Kratophanous powers can be benevolent, yet are also terrible; in a word, sublime.¹⁶

More elaborate pagan descriptions of religion do exist, such as those specified by Sallustius in the middle of the fourth century AD, following the lead of his patron the emperor Julian, when these matters

¹¹ Weber, *Sociology*, 28. ¹² Vernant, *Religions*, 6 ff.

¹³ Beard *et al.*, *Religions*, 31, with reference to Roman writers on communication with the gods.

¹⁴ Cf. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 346 f., and Weber, *Sociology*, 30.

¹⁵ Gauchet, *Désenchantement*, 46.

¹⁶ Edmund Burke (*Philosophical Enquiry*, 110 f.) described this phenomenon of the sublime well: 'because we are bound by the condition of our nature to ascend to . . . pure and intellectual ideas, through the medium of sensible images, and to judge of these divine qualities by their evident acts and exertions, it becomes extremely hard to disentangle our idea of the cause from the effect by which we are led to know it . . . If we rejoice, we rejoice with trembling.'

were becoming significant to pagans who, feeling besieged by emergent Christian dogma, were taking more or less systematic stock of their religion. The functional concepts of divinity were specified as creation, harmonisation, animation and guardianship.¹⁷ But such greater elaborations, mythographic as well as theological, belong to a different order of analysis than that to which immediate attention is directed here. Before speaking of myth in any way beyond the pronouncements of the logothetes and logographers of non-literate societies, it needs to be registered in mythical narratives using mythic imagery and mythic material, later elaborated as mythography,¹⁸ and both mythology and theology require considerable degrees of development for a specialised personnel, a class of scribes and intellectuals that might take the form of a priesthood (priestly being here understood in the general sense of a specialised sodality, including certain classes of secular priesthood in ancient Rome), lending consistency and a certain degree of canonisation to a religion, such as that required for periodic chanting of the *Enuma Elish* at neo-Babylonian festivals,¹⁹ or the interpretation of the Sibylline Oracles.

What is therefore being suggested is that the level of description and analysis to be adopted here be one that starts from cultic practice, the concrete point of application of religion and its primary anchor. This tallies with the anthropological approach to the study of religion which, from its beginnings in the nineteenth century, stressed the analytical distinction between cult and its mythological, credal and, by extension, theological and literary redactions and expressions;²⁰ one would need only to consider the transformation of cultic centres and divinities from polytheistic to monotheistic worship to gain an appreciation of this. The attention to cult, however, has had only limited impact on approaches to the history of religion which, based primarily on philology, have privileged the literary and theological redactions, despite the outstanding exception represented by possibilities emerging from the work on theonyms by Hermann Usener (d. 1905), who sought to derive an almost anthropological theory of polytheism, and of the transition to monotheism, using philological

¹⁷ Sallustius, *Gods*, § vii.

¹⁸ Detienne, *Invention*, 154 and ch. 4, *passim*; Gladigow, 'Strukturprobleme', 296. See also Jolles, *Einfache Formen*, 79 ff.

¹⁹ Smith, 'Scripture', 39, 54 n. 41, and, more generally, Weber, *Sociology*, ch. 8, *passim*.

²⁰ For instance: Robertson Smith, *Religion*, 16 ff. In general, resistance to the mainly British and French anthropological as distinct from diffusionist approaches has been perhaps most explicitly articulated in German scholarship (Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 227 ff.), but is of broader implicit remit elsewhere, especially in Orientalist and Semitic studies within academic institutions.

analysis.²¹ This is a matter of particular relevance for the theogony of Allāh at the centre of this book.

Usener's analytical orientation towards a 'science of mythology'²² approaches a level of description correlative with the above considerations. It is one which seeks to treat the cognitive mechanisms associated with cultic practice, in his case devolving to language, and most particularly to etymology.²³ This approach was a child of its age, sharing a number of assumptions common in nineteenth-century history of religion, principally a teleology ascribed to Christianity. Usener's contribution to the study of religion, like Cumont's (an admirer of Usener), retains its pertinence despite its teleological and evolutionist assumptions. His scheme of religious development was not party to the ubiquitous postulation of a primal monotheism (*Urmonotheismus*).²⁴ Usener's was a vast theogony, with an approach directed towards collective phenomena, veering towards the sociological, one which, crucially, rendered Roman religion unexceptional, contrary to a long scholarly tradition, and made it amenable to comparative and general study.²⁵

This said, it needs to be emphasised that Usener concerned himself with anthropology or with cult and associated ritual only peripherally.²⁶ Yet his work on divine names is most useful and suggestive in this regard.²⁷ He proposed that there is a discernible evolution in Graeco-Roman religion from divine names (*Götternamen*) to the Name of God (*göttliche Name*), corresponding to a move from gods of the instance or occasion (*Augenblicksgötter*) to personal or, rather, specialised and durable gods (*Sondergötter*), the latter corresponding to Varro's *dei certi*, on to great personal gods.²⁸ The first are conceived only at their moment of

²¹ Usener, *Götternamen*, vi and *passim*; Mauss, 'Noms des dieux', 291. On the reception and enormous influence of Usener, despite the deep antipathy of sections of the academe, see Schlesier, *Kulte*, 195 ff.; Bader, 'Gott nennen', 325 ff.; Kany, 'Usener', 160, 165, 172 ff.

²² Cassirer, *Sprache und Mythos*, 2, 20.

²³ Usener, *Götternamen*, 73 ff.; Bader, 'Gott nennen', 319 f.

²⁴ Mauss, 'Noms des dieux', 294 – this postulate is associated with the names of Schelling, Müller and others: Kany, 'Usener', 163.

²⁵ Scheid and Svenbro, 'Götternamen', 95, 97 f.

²⁶ Mauss, 'Noms des dieux', 296. Kany ('Usener', 161) places cult as the fifth and last step he discerns in Usener's psychologistic argument. These are: analysis of religious conceptualisation through the formation of divine names, elementary unconscious processes of the imagination which underlie it (personalisation and metaphor), forms of symbolism, forms of actual myths, forms of cult.

²⁷ For the following two paragraphs, Usener, *Götternamen*, 272 ff., 316 ff. and *passim*, and Bader, 'Gott nennen', 317 ff., 326 f., 334 ff., 339.

²⁸ The notion of a personal god is complex, and still constitutes a terminological problem not altogether resolved. That a god may become a personal god when he or she acquires a sociomorphic interpretation, be it in terms of natural phenomena, ethical or social functions, or art, is one relevant

appearance or salience, exemplified by the divinisation of lightning as *Keraunos* for instance. A *Sondergott* represents the durable divinisation of a phenomenon such as lightning, with *keranos* becoming an epithet.

These transitions, albeit with a decided evolutionist perspective, do not imply that the *Sondergötter* obliterated the former: though the former were considered by him to be vestigial, they continued to constitute Roman polytheistic private and public cultic practice until well into the third century AD. They expressed a fetishistic implicit theology, that gods are manifest energies, energies that can acquire mythological expression.²⁹ Moreover, the transition to a personal god is allied with a conceptual move from worship in an immediate situation, to a more durable notion of divinity as an individual species of beings which can then be elaborated functionally, nominatively and otherwise.³⁰

Augenblicksgötter appear as epithets and predicates of unspecified subjects, and take the form of adjectives or *nomina agentis*. In the spirit of the above considerations on cult, it is rite that makes god. In a cultic setting, worship takes the form of exclamation and predication. The *Sondergötter* appear when the appellative gives way to a proper name;³¹ when a plurality of possibilities for naming an uncanny energy are ultimately allocated to one specific (but not necessarily singular), durably named deity, who as a result becomes polyonymous,³² the various names applied to a deity come to indicate growing social and geographical reach, but also to express the different epithets, functions, localities and forms of the deity.³³ In a way, worship of the *Sondergott* signifies the possibility of an implicit theology, however expressed; but in all cases, this is one that testifies to the crystallisation – iconographic, toponymic, epithetic – of energies and acts, an elliptical expression of functions yielding a more or less abstract notion of the divine act and of divinity itself.³⁴

Proper names for deities are fully accomplished when myth helps in the elaboration of monolatry, later of Christianity, which completes the transition from the instantaneous local energy to the existence of a species of divine individuals. In between, Usener discerned a proliferation of

element. All the while, one needs to bear in mind that varying functions attributed to a deity are more relevant to its definition and identification: see von Stietencron, 'Spezifizierung', 63.

²⁹ Scheid, 'Hiérarchie et structure', 184, 199.

³⁰ Usener, *Götternamen*, 280; Dörrie, 'Gottesbegriff', 944 ff. Gladigow ('Gottesnamen', 1209) has noted a problem with historical specification in Usener's scheme.

³¹ Gladigow, 'Gottesnamen', 1211.

³² On polyonymy, Usener, *Götternamen*, 334 f., and Gladigow, 'Gottesnamen', 1221 ff.

³³ See Gladigow, 'Gottesnamen', 1223, 1231, 1233 f. The example of Isis is particularly striking and apt, with her cultic epithet of *myrionomos*, many-named.

³⁴ Scheid and Svenbro, 'Götternamen', 102.

epithets.³⁵ Some of these are functional, such as Zeus Horkios for oaths and Zeus Trephonios for nurture, others mythical, such as Keraunos for thunder and Likaïos for the Zeus-wolf, or local: Zeus Olympios, Zeus Kasios (Syria), for instance.³⁶ All this betokens a remarkable plasticity of panthea, and opportunities for considerable recompositions. Clearly epithets not only are representative of an intermediate stage, but persist with the full individuation of deities, great and small, especially as they take on a trans-local remit, sometimes a cosmopolitan remit. These epithets connect deities with social schemata, indicating specific effects desired of the deity, with negative epithets, relating to destructive powers, taking on an apotropaic function. In more complex religious systems, epithets serve to connect local deities to those of more central or general remit of action.³⁷

All these matters, mentioned as a rule of thumb rather than as accounts of religious history that can be demonstrated seamlessly by empirical means, are highly important for an understanding of the structures of polytheism and the emergence of monotheism, and, ultimately, for sketching the genesis of Allāh. Divine names as appellatives, as epicleses and instruments of conjuration, are crucial for an appreciation of the way in which the divine economy of polytheism is to a considerable degree governed by a regime of transference, association and accumulation of names, epithets and functions which, in effect, effaces distinctions between divinities as singular beings or individual agents, and renders one and all an energy effecting particular or more general kinds of actions³⁸ – representing a condition of the social expansion of cult that no longer needs a dictionary of mutually convertible deities. As for epicleses, they are not so much speech-acts of qualification or of description, nor of naming, as much as ritual utterances allied to conjuration in the context of cult. It is well known to the study of religion that uttering names can actuate divine presence.

Uttering an epiclesis usually associates bodily gestures and enunciative tonalities, with the epicletic appellation of the divinity, an appellation which is normally distinct from the name of the deity, and often paraphrastic or euphemistic.³⁹ We shall have occasion to see this in connection with the Allāhumma of the Arabian *talbiya*. Divine attention is drawn thereby to the presence of the worshipper or group of worshippers and supplicants.⁴⁰ It is the enunciative aspect of a ritual whose sole element of

³⁵ On which see Gladigow, 'Gottesnamen', 1210 ff., 1226 ff., 1233 ff.

³⁶ In all, see Vernant, *Myth and Society*, ch. 5.

³⁷ Gladigow ('Gottesnamen', 1226) notes most usefully that cultic epithets are not generally identical with theological attributes, once these are elaborated.

³⁸ Vernant, *Religions*, 10. ³⁹ Gladigow, 'Gottesnamen', 1219.

⁴⁰ Laager, 'Epiklesis', 578 f., 581 f.

stability is not so much conceptual and theological but cultic exultation, and is in this way akin to acclamation, political and aretological.⁴¹

This type of acclamation is usually – but not invariably⁴² – associated with a location; hence, the proliferation of toponymic epithets for polytheistic deities, the geographical locations of cult persisting even as deities changed names, and as polytheism gave way to monotheism, with particular deities worshipped in a variety of locations, some considerably distant, and with saints often inhabiting territories earlier preserved for polytheistic deities. Clearly, in formal and functional terms, the epiclesis has very strong affinities with the more elaborate forms of prayer that develop with the greater institutionalisation of cult and its transformation to religion as commonly understood, particularly supplication,⁴³ and the boundaries are quite unclear. Both epicletic pronouncements and prayers share a number of substantive concordances, such as the pronouncement of appellatives and epithets, formulae of supplication, and the use of second person singular form of address, in addition to bodily gestures.⁴⁴

What we are dealing with, therefore, is ultimately a substratum of animism.⁴⁵ Animism implies a number of attestable cognitive mechanisms relevant to *Augenblicksgötter*, to *Sondergötter* and to later forms of religion as well. Of these mechanisms, the ones of major relevance to this discussion are the conflation of the signifier and the signified, the attribution of the qualities of living organisms, primarily human, to cult-objects (anthropomorphism and anthropopathy), the ambivalent modalities and exchanges of control between worshipper and the object worshipped and, in more complex and differentiated societies, the concretisation of abstractions.⁴⁶ In all, these carry forward the essentially magical substructure of cultic practice overall, and animate cultic locations, cultic objects and epicletic formulae as well.

⁴¹ Peterson, *EIS ΘΕΟΣ*, chs. 3 and 4.

⁴² One might mention here the phenomenon of the Roman Lares, domestic protective fetishes kept in domestic shrines, and liable to move as the family moved, much like the Yahweh of the Israelites (Beard *et al.*, *Religions*, 296, and Weber, *Sociology*, 17 f., who made this comparison explicitly), and like some mobile divinities of the Arabs.

⁴³ On which see Michel, 'Gebet II', 1 and *passim*, for a historical account in classical paganism, Judaism and Christianity.

⁴⁴ Von Severus 'Gebet I', 1135, 1154 ff.

⁴⁵ I am not convinced that one needs to avoid using this most serviceable and appropriate descriptive concept. Its denial, or its apologetic use, is generally impelled by justifiable aversion to a blanket concept of savage, pre-logical mentalities and societies. Neither am I convinced that concepts such as this tend to 'devitalize' data (Geertz, 'Religion', 2, 39).

⁴⁶ Ellen, 'Fetishism', 219 ff.; 'Anthropomorphisierung', *EM*.

These mechanisms are inextricably connected to that vast substratum of more immediately tangible aspects of cultic deity, irrespective of whether it be iconic or aniconic, named or nameless – the substratum of functions, geographical locations and names, all of which are almost carelessly redolent of kratophany, the manifestation of energy, which is the basic constituent of all divinity. That cultic deities have generally specific geographical spheres of operation and of authority has long been recognised; ubiquitous or ‘high’ gods will be taken up later.

Polytheistic deities generally inhabit specific localities, or at least need to be conjured in such localities. This is attested not only by pagan but also by Christian authors who construe older deities in their locales in the guise of demons,⁴⁷ who are also bearers of kratophany. When Cyrus issued a proclamation authorising the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, he specified that he meant the temple of the God of Israel ‘who is in Jerusalem’ (Ezra, 1.3). This deity was not only the God of a specific group, but also the lord of a specific territorial domain, like other deities, including major deities whose remit transcended the locality of their origin, and which, when they moved, were in a variety of ways indigenised by means of syncretism.

For discussions that follow, it is important to bear in mind that the consecration of sacred spaces, of whatever nature and extension, and of cult-objects as well, including verbal cult-objects such as names, epithets and epicleses, performative acts all of them, is the result of a social process performed by a duly constituted social or more restrictively religious constituency. Consecration empowers and animates space. In this way, spaces and objects so identified, sacralised and ‘set apart’ create an auxiliary of holiness, of names, epithets and beings, which is commonly described as the sacred.⁴⁸ Clearly, the view of the holy and the sacred taken here is situational, not substantivist.

The profusion of syncretism

The above considerations will help interpret a number of salient and, at first, bewildering features in the religious history of Hellenistic and late antique times; it might be kept in mind, within this vast field, that emphasis

⁴⁷ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.24. The action of Christianity has been described as introducing a dualistic division of unseen beings into normatively weighted energies, *agathodaemon* and *cacodaemon*: Fletcher, *Allegory*, 46 f.

⁴⁸ On distinctions between the holy and the sacred, and on the uses of these terms, see the most illuminating accounts in ‘Holy, idea of’, *ER*, and ‘Sacred and profane’, *ER*.

is placed upon themes that have a particular salience to the interpretation of Arab polytheism and the emergence of Paleo-Islam. In Hellenistic and late antique times, one witnesses the profusion of deities carrying the same name but active in a variety of locations, sometimes very distantly separated. Evident is the appearance of deities with different names to which are assigned the same powers and functions, and often depicted according to comparable iconographic convention. In this respect, one might keep in mind local deities given the names, single or in syncretistic combination, of great, trans-local divinities.⁴⁹ Also in evidence is the generalisation of appeal to multiple deities irrespective of the presumed specific function of each, and the worship by travellers of the deities of whatever location they happen to visit.⁵⁰

One might note saliently the existence of nameless deities acting as indistinct noumena, but decidedly energetic and potent nonetheless, often known epithetically or epically with reference to phenomena they control. To the theme of namelessness one would need to add divine namelessness as a token of self-evidence, with deities designated simply by the generic appellative 'God' and its cognates, with or without a definite article, or primarily by epithets, or indeed designated by the absence of an utterable name as with Yhwh, post-exilically often indicated as Adonai.⁵¹ Nameless deities, or deities with names withheld, condense conceptually the notion of generalised kratophany specified by accentuation for which namelessness is used in the acts of supplication and propitiation should be directed.⁵²

Turning to the more elementary anthropological aspects of matters discussed so far, it seems that what might be referred to generically as *dei incerti*, *genii loci*, *genii familiari*, the domestic Lares, *theoi patrooi*, the Arab *jinn*, local spirits that guard their worshippers, punish them or toy with them, are the elementary energies, duly transmuted, that animate divine names and give them anthropological purchase. Similar kratophanic potencies reside in more elaborated notions of divinity that appear in inscriptions and literary sources.⁵³ The myriad forms, aspects and locations of divinities constitute elaborations of this elementary form of the religious life in which kratophany dwells in cult-objects, animated by the ascription of

⁴⁹ On which, see Gladigow, 'Gottesnamen', 1224.

⁵⁰ On which see Robertson Smith, *Religion*, 94–5 n.

⁵¹ Gladigow, 'Gottesnamen', 1217 f., 1220; Dodd, *Bible*, 4 ff.; Bottéro, *Mésopotamie*, 239 ff. More on this matter below.

⁵² Cf. Belayche, 'Hypsistos', 55; 'Deus deum', 163.

⁵³ See von Domaszewski, *Abhandlungen*, 157 ff.; *Brill's New Pauly*, 5.756 f.

names which act as media for conjuration, names that act as indexically as do cult-objects and their auxiliaries. Sense and reference, noumen and cult-object, representation and presence, are for the purposes of cultic practice indistinguishable. In this context of interpretation, proper names appear analytically as second-order phenomena,⁵⁴ followed at a variety of removes by myths, later by mythographies and theologies.⁵⁵

Moreover, in this situation of bare cultic observance, divinity indwelling within images and other cult-objects, or represented by them sympathetically, appears essentially as a predicate of names, actions or places; divinities are divine initially on account not of specific personalities, but of actions performed. Cultic activity in these circumstances is the occasion not so much for reflection upon the signification of the cult-object, as of conjuring numinous effects and precipitating kratophanic intervention by forms of communication that would range between supplication and votive propitiation, to partaking in the sacrificial meal on the part of the votaries. This last act might be exemplified by the eucharistic rite, with its con-substantiation of the sacrificial lamb, in which the signifier is transformed into the signified,⁵⁶ in a form of expiatory purification.⁵⁷ Signification and the 'reading' of the divine belong properly to another, distinct level of analysis, that of mythography and iconography, literature, theology and politics. What is in the essence of devotions before a cult-object is ritual animation which conjures up the presence of an energy,⁵⁸ and which then manifests itself in oracular pronouncements or other epiphanic actions.

As we speak of cult, there seems to be little difference in this elementary functional regard between figural, zoomorphic, anthropomorphic and

⁵⁴ Vernant, *Figures*, 21 ff.; Belting, *Likeness*, 9 and *passim*. The eccentric genius of Oswald Spengler had underlined this property of Roman religion eloquently: *Decline*, 1.404 ff.

⁵⁵ Dörrie, 'Gottesvorstellung', for historical development. See also, saliently for the present argument, Bottéro, *Mésopotamie*, 261.

⁵⁶ Bevan, *Holy Images*, 42 f.; Ellen, 'Fetishism', 226; Stroumsa, *Sacrifice*, ch. 3, *passim*; Theissen, *Primitive Christian Religion*, 156 ff.

⁵⁷ This rite, and its antecedents in the Old Testament and in Hellenic and Hellenistic literature (including Prometheus and Antigone), is well traced by Williams, 'Jesus' death', chs. 1–4. Concordances with the myth of Dionysus are very suggestively discussed by al-Sa'fī, *al-Qurbān*, 139 ff. Daly (*Origins*, 104 ff., 127 ff., and *passim*) discusses philosophical, spiritualising influences on the Christian notion of sacrifice, in the course of a systematic study of its theology from the Old Testament to the early church. See also Hubert and Mauss, 'Essai', 300, and cf. Vesnel, 'Self-sacrifice', 183 f. Tertullian (*De Spectaculis*, 29 f.), adjuring Christians to avoid the cruel pleasures of the public games, offers stronger fare: martyrs instead of athletes, and the blood of Christ when blood is craved, promise a vast spectacle on the Last Days.

⁵⁸ Bevan, *Holy Images*, 31 ff.; Marin, *Pouvoirs*, 10 f., 14; Belting, *Likeness*, 37; and cf. Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind*, 18.

aniconic cult-objects.⁵⁹ Conjuring the kratophanic presence of sublime forces is independent of the means of representation or the medium of conjuration.⁶⁰ This sympathetic susceptibility and capacity of the cult-object was not only constitutive of cultic practice at the point of application, or correlative with an elementary moment in religion. Its manifest clarity was made into a component of Neo-Platonic metaphysics. It was clear to Plotinus (AD 205–269/70); Iamblichus' 'scientific theology' (*epistemonikē theologia*), supposedly more in tune with 'popular religion',⁶¹ was in part a meditation upon the sympathetic capacity of the cult-object, and not unrelated cult sacrifice,⁶² with or without sublimation.

In a way that conjoins theology and cult, this sympathetic quality is one which was deliberately and tellingly theorised by iconodule Christian notions of the image as an object of worship, adoration and succour, collaterally distinguishing the icon from the idol. Quite apart from elaborations in terms of Biblical typology (such as the image of Ark of the Covenant standing for the Theotokos), or of Neo-Platonic categories by means of which the Holy Spirit is distinct from the Son in its manner of procession from the Father, the image is nevertheless in essence, and with regard to its effect, 'of like character' to its prototype, and the Son is himself a natural image of the Father.⁶³ For cultic purposes, images designate the energy of the transcendent sublime prototype made present immediately. This does not involve necessarily the cognitive functions of description or of elaboration by means of Neo-Platonic categories, both of which belong to a distinct level at once of analysis and of religious experience and expression.⁶⁴ It might be said that kissing or touching an icon performs the desired function in a manner that is the reverse of sticking a needle in the image of an enemy, or of using an apotropaic talisman. The distinctions are theological, not anthropological, and this theoretical elaboration of the icon goes a step further than some rudimentarily elaborated late antique pagan notions of the idol which, while affirming idolatrous cults, yet strove by a variety of ways, allegorical and apologetically rationalising, to

⁵⁹ It might be noted that thinking in terms of the iconic and the aniconic as representing cognitive developmental stages is not particularly helpful.

⁶⁰ Cf. Vernant, *Religions*, 55, and Finkelberg, 'Two kinds', 36 ff.

⁶¹ Bevan, *Holy Images*, 76 f.; *Semiotik*, § 47.3.3. ⁶² Cf. Harl, 'Sacrifice', 13.

⁶³ St John of Damascus, *Divine Images*, §§ 1.12, 3.18.

⁶⁴ St John of Damascus, *Divine Images*, 'Apology', § 9; Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, 20 f., 28; Gero, 'Eucharistic doctrine', 4 f.; Zoubouli, 'Esthétique', 75, 79 ff. That the origins of these views of the efficacy of icons reside in the New Testament and in Patristic writings, rather than being 'oriental-magical' (Gero, 'Eucharistic doctrine', 10), is not particularly relevant to the present argument, except in so far as it indicates that these two origins are connected in determinate conceptual ways, and by no means disjunctive.

place an interpretative distance between deity and representation, while in the same breath castigating the Christian cult of Jesus.⁶⁵

Yet approaching this phenomenon from its literary, mythographic or theological expression has long been regarded as being adequate to understanding it. It has been maintained, for instance, that the divine world of polytheism is one that is governed by an order based upon an organised pantheon, standing above its ancillary and subordinate world of local noumena, generally termed demons, the *jinn* of the Arabs, and of multifarious messengers and angels – or that it was otherwise primitive and disorderly. But it has also long been realised – with reference to Christianity, at least – that theology is not a reliable interpreter of belief on account of its apologetic nature and by ‘theological concealments’,⁶⁶ a feature which tends to obscure the more elementary forms that undergird higher religious conceptions and often occasion apologetic discourse.⁶⁷

This point is fundamental to the discussions that follow. Its importance arises not least because the distance between Christian and polytheist worship at the point of concrete application is smaller than might be thought. What constitutes an object of idolatrous worship is less the object or the manner of worship than the institutional certification of the object worshipped; thus St John of Damascus, for instance, launching a long tradition of anti-Muslim polemic, decreed the veneration of the Ka’ba to be idolatrous, while designating the congruent worship of the Cross summarily to be otherwise.⁶⁸ Torah scrolls kept in synagogues in or against walls to which prayer is directed are of course neither anthropomorphic nor betylic; nevertheless such scrolls are inhabited by a sacredness and an energy that causes them to be treated as idols, for in them something iconic of Yahweh resides substantively, as He had resided in his Jerusalem

⁶⁵ Julian, *Works*, 2.311 ff; Celsus, *Doctrine*, 56 f., 71; Geffcken, ‘Bilderstreit’, 311 ff. It goes without saying that early Christian divines, worried about animate images, no matter how ambivalently, sometimes insisted apologetically that images were not worshipped, thereby drawing a distinction from pagan worship. Over and above Biblical injunctions (Bevan, *Holy Image*, 86 ff.), this tendency gathered force during the iconoclastic controversy under specific historical conditions. Visual representation of God the Father does not seem to have come before the fourteenth century, in western Europe, following a long development in which He was successively represented by the Son, the Tablets, the nimbus and the hand (Didron, *Iconographie*, 178 ff.)

⁶⁶ Weber (*Sociology*, 20) on the incarnation in Christianity and Hinduism.

⁶⁷ See von Harnack, *Lehrbuch*, 2.530, speaking of religion’s ‘ursprüngliche Ordnung und Zweckbeziehung’, its ‘einfachste Ausdrucksformen’. This point also underlies Durkheim’s theory of religion in general.

⁶⁸ *De Haeresibus*, § 769B, text in Sahas, *St. John*, 137. The trope of Muslim idolatry had a long history, not least as, with the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem, a huge statue of Muḥammad was reported to have been witnessed at the al-Aqṣā mosque; an explanation in terms of a long history of anxiety by Christians towards their own iconolatry has been suggested by Luchitskaja, ‘Idoles’, 284 f., 295 ff.

temple. The Pharisaic notion that Torah scrolls, when written in ink, on parchment and in 'Assyrian' characters, cause the hands that touch them to be defiled⁶⁹ is yet another incidence of the priestly theological concealment of the fetishistic nature of worship at the point of application.

What is being suggested here is that the worship of deities, durably named or occasionally perceived, locally enracinated or trans-local, is distinct analytically from the mythographic elaboration of panthea. The latter pertain to a different historical phenomenon, one correlative with organisational capacity and lettered elaboration which do not, nevertheless, sever religion from its elementary cultic nature at points of application, no matter what degree and form of transcendence is ascribed to greater divinities. There was, in certain social milieux, a divine world that had been mythographically organised and tidied up, with, for instance, a Baal and an El in an uncertain and vague relationship of primacy, the former being the hands-down deity while the latter was 'remote', delegating daily activity to His executive arm, or otherwise having suffered a fate similar to that of Chronos at the hands of his son Zeus.⁷⁰ The imprecise description of El as the 'supreme god' would seem decidedly to be the result of a literary convention, regardless of the mythographic schemes of theomachy, of parricide or of other narratives; in this case, it was Baal, in his myriad locations and with his various epithets and epicleses, who was the effective deity at the point of application.

Apart from a mythographic taxonomy of the divine, a High God would be just one god among others. In fact, claims for this could be made on behalf of virtually any deity,⁷¹ homage to the greatness of deities being implicit in all religious address.⁷² When given a determinate cultic salience, under determinate circumstances, it might emerge as an actual primary deity to whom mythographers and votaries would subordinate other deities or with whom they would syncretise them, without these last being functionally derogated; it is not necessary in such circumstances to suppose the existence of an aboriginal deity in abeyance.⁷³ But the fact

⁶⁹ Goodman, 'Sacred scripture', 103 ff. The exactitude with which the object is described itself bespeaks its cultic status.

⁷⁰ Albright, *Yahweh*, 104; Haddād and Majā'is, *Ba'l Hadad, passim*; Teixidor, *Pagan God*, 12. See the argument and counter-argument of Oldenburg, *Conflict*, and L'Héroux, *Rank*, and cf. the argument of Kaizer, 'Oriental cults', 31.

⁷¹ Smith, 'Common theology', *passim*. ⁷² Belayche, 'Hypsistos', 37, 40.

⁷³ Smith ('The unknown god: myth in history' in *Imagining Religion*, 66 ff.) excavated and reconstructed a most convincing picture of the way in which the Maoris created a supreme, 'unknown' deity in the second half of the nineteenth century in parallel with Biblical tradition and in a nativist response to missionary activity, under conditions of rapid change, including the elaboration of royalty, concluding (89) that *homo religiosus* is pre-eminently *homo faber*.

that hymnody directed at supposedly lesser deities assigns them attributes commonly allocated to a monolatrous – or monotheistic – deity,⁷⁴ even an attribute of omnipotence, makes them, like great gods, all-purpose deities at the concrete points of application. Even attributes like *solus* and *monos* have a 'contrastive and elative force pertaining to quality, not an ontologically exclusive . . . one', cultic proclamations being phatic rather than descriptive.⁷⁵ This would indicate that what is involved in henotheistic and monotheistic developments is a transference to one divine instance of characteristics that could essentially be shared by all, again at the point of concrete application.

So much for basic description, which continued to apply locally. Yet for the Hellenistic period and with Late Antiquity, we are dealing with an œcumenical order which saw an appreciable amount of functional differentiation, socially, culturally and religiously, as it did of metropolitan expansion, with varying degrees and modalities of provincial integration, and of regional acculturation under the aegis of empire. The Roman cult of the emperor, for instance, in the various forms it took, was a means of enmeshing and localising the effect of power conveyed by imperial cult, and of incorporating the emperor within the local divine economies, thus enhancing the domination of the cities, and especially of the capital, over outlying regions, of the elite over the demos, of the imperial Graecophone culture over indigenous cultures.⁷⁶ In all, late pagan Rome did thereby foster a situation of œcumenism which generated a common religious language.⁷⁷ Earlier, the Assyrians had invented ancestor gods as a matter of imperial policy, helping to foster ties between local and more central deities.⁷⁸

Local practices preserved their magical substructure of cultic worship, and these were perfectly appropriate for the supra-regional and ancient Arab deity Allât, a form of worship which took divine names as attributes rather than as exclusive personal names.⁷⁹ It seems difficult in this and certain other cases to decide whether Allât had a cult located over a vast region, or if her name was only a theonym that was held in common. Generically

⁷⁴ Wyatt, 'Understanding polytheism', 32 f.; von Domaszewski, *Abhandlungen*, 161 ff. For a discussion of monolatry, henotheism and monotheism in terms of available scholarship, Vesnel, 'Thrice one', 85 ff. and van Nuffelen, 'Pagan monotheism'. Marksches ('Price of monotheism', 109 ff.) offers a definition in doctrinal terms.

⁷⁵ Vesnel, 'Thrice one', 148, 150.

⁷⁶ Price, *Rituals*, 242 and part 1, *passim*; Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 330; Beard *et al.*, *Religions*, 348 ff. On the organisation of this cult in Syria from the time of Augustus, see Butcher, *Roman Syria*, 370 f., who manfully works through the incoherent and fragmentary nature of the evidence.

⁷⁷ Mitchell, 'Further thoughts', 169, 170. ⁷⁸ Thompson, *Mythic Past*, 169.

⁷⁹ Krone, *al-Lât*, 297.

magical substructure and the interpretation of cult, local significance and general sense, might thus be seen as distinct but overlapping in a supra-regional or even a cosmopolitan setting brought about by the complex societies of the period. But this does not weaken the proposition that interpretative efforts in terms of mythology or theology do not of necessity alter the elementary magical substructure of cult in a meaningful way.

Some supra-regional and indeed imperial deities had a very wide geographical and functional remit. Among others, Zeus, Jupiter, Isis, Mithras, Poseidon, Anū, Ishtar, Hadad, Shamash, Mardūk and Baalshamin were such.⁸⁰ So also were Yahweh, after he was transfigured into *ho kyrios*, and Elohim exclusively into the singular *ho theos*, and indeed Isis, Cybele and Mithras, with an elaborate paraphernalia of titles, epithets, functions, associations and theological speculations.⁸¹ To be sure, although the prolific mythographic elaboration of deities in terms of their different functions (of theomachy, murder, creation, incest, the Flood, the Deucalion and much else) and their iconographies were largely the result of literary, priestly and other conventions,⁸² this nevertheless had a number of concrete and lasting effects.

Patterns of syncretism

Borne along by empire and the acculturation brought in its course, the primary such effect was durable and trans-local personalisation and individuation of certain divinities, whereby divine attributes and epithets came to acquire a genitive form of expression.⁸³ This is in contrast to deities having a predicative form and adjectival designation,⁸⁴ the personalised deity thus becoming the unambiguous personal author of his or her deeds, such that it becomes clear that it was Jupiter and not Mars, for instance, who specifically caused rain.⁸⁵ This is not to say that Jupiter and others, and lesser deities as well, might not also perform other functions, or be approached as all-purpose deities.⁸⁶ In all, cult-objects are generally transitive and metonymic;⁸⁷ the conveyancing of sublime charisma appears infinitely reproducible precisely because of its elementary quality: names, epithets, epicleses, avatars, utterances, images, sacred spaces, idols and icons are various media for conveying this sublime charisma, infinitely reproducible, in principle transferable over spaces and media, an

⁸⁰ James, *Worship*. ⁸¹ Turcan, *Cults*, 221 ff., 70 ff.

⁸² Wyatt, 'Understanding polytheism', 39 f. ⁸³ Von Domaszewski, *Abhandlungen*, 162.

⁸⁴ Usener, *Götternamen*, 279. ⁸⁵ Usener, *Götternamen*, 167 f.

⁸⁶ See Vesnel, 'Thrice one', 122–5, on Apollo. ⁸⁷ Ellen, 'Fetishism', 221 f.

indivisible elementary structure divisible in this way as well as by means of transfiguration.

In light of this, syncretism would seem to be written into polytheism under conditions of regional interconnection, expansion and centralisation, whatever their extent and nature, not to speak of imperial or otherwise cosmopolitan conditions. As suggested, syncretism can hardly be regarded as an adulteration of something pristine, as the adventitious result of miscegenation.⁸⁸ It is, rather, like panthea,⁸⁹ a pattern of internal relationships to be described in their particular instances,⁹⁰ each being an instantiation of the sublime. It is aggregative and additive, consolidating the energy of the one deity with that of another, devolving structurally to two possible results that will be characterised now.

The simpler result is a conjunction of names that might draw in to one cultic location different constituencies of worshippers or cultic associations, resulting from political and social exchanges. The second consequence, correlative with acculturation, is a situation in which one deity might be named in terms of another, the two being mutually transferable: Allāt-Athena is a case in point for both, in Palmyra and in Buṣra, drawing in Arab-Aramaic and Hellenised constituencies, and opening up room for the assimilation of the former in terms of an *interpretatio graeca*, evident in iconographic representation, adding to the consolidation of energy an adjunction of functions as mythographically described in the case of Athena Parthenos.⁹¹

Both movements can be complemented by henotheistic tendencies, and might lead to monolatrous and then, under determinate conditions, to monotheistic developments. This was perhaps facilitated by the tendency in some cultic locations for nameless deities – there were some 200 such altars in the region of Palmyra alone – to be regarded as dwellings for supra-regional deities. Baalshamīn fared so in Palmyra, where moreover Baal, one of the ‘supreme’ deities, never appeared alone on any known bas-relief or sculpture.⁹²

⁸⁸ Berner (*Synkretismus-Begriff*, ch. 1) offers a sketch of uses of the term ‘syncretism’ in the history and phenomenology of religion. See the critical consideration of the concept of syncretism in the ‘Introduction’ to Stewart and Shaw, *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism*, 1 ff.

⁸⁹ Vernant, *Myth and Society*, 99. ⁹⁰ Cf. the discussion of Martin, ‘Cecropian Minerva’, 140.

⁹¹ In contrast to the Near East, the equivalence of northern and western divinities in the Roman empire involved either the straightforward translation of divine names into Latin, or their suppression, the last particularly the case in Illyria and Africa. Only with the enthronement of the Batavian emperor Postumus (r. 260–268) in the so-called Gallic empire were the names of Barbarian deities transliterated on coins. This fact seems to some degree to account for the difficulty of excavating the names of Germanic and, even more so, Celtic deities who stood behind Roman names: Wissowa, ‘*Interpretatio Romana*’, 8 ff., 22 f., 39, and cf. Beard *et al.*, *Religions*, 339 ff.

⁹² Drijvers, *Religion of Palmyra*, 10, 15.

More usually, however, local deities came to acquire the names of deities more widely spread, and this type of syncretism normally involved the adoption of deities spread and worshipped by broader, sometimes imperial and other cosmopolitan instances, giving rise, in the Hellenistic and late antique Fertile Crescent, to the *interpretatio graeca* of local religions,⁹³ following a considerable period of *interpretatio babylonica* and, in Phoenicia at least, an *interpretatio aegyptica*. All this betokens elaboration in the context of large-scale acculturating political instances, providing layers of ultimately cosmopolite interpretation upon layers of transfiguration whereby local deities came to acquire social and institutional consistency beyond local cultic practice. This assured both persistence over time and the definitive, tradition-bearing transformation of *Augenblicksgötter* to consistently named *Sondergötter* and on to personal deities of broad geographical remit, deities who might be conjoined with others or indeed take them over by giving their own names to them.

This syncretistic process may be illustrated by the example of Rome, an excellent case in point, exceptionally well documented and studied, perhaps due crucially to the Romans having been indefatigable record keepers, and the high degree of elaboration of the Roman priesthoods.⁹⁴ The Roman setting was highly elaborated, and illustrates well certain standard forms of polytheistic complexity which endow the core fetishism of all cults with a durability allowing conceptual elaboration and sublimation.⁹⁵ The canny and precise ways in which the Roman priesthood managed syncretism is testimony to a precise understanding of gods and divine action;⁹⁶ the flexibility of their sacerdotal theology reflects a sensitive attention to the requirements of cult at the point of concrete application, and to the inseparability from this of an implicit as distinct from an elaborated theology in the sense discussed above.

Metropolitan Rome and her empire, from fairly early on, and in line with the development of cosmopolite taste for things both famously ancient and imperial, came under the spell of deities of eastern provenance. This fascination found official expression that involved cultic developments at the edge of syncretism, whereby foreign cults were given Roman cultic forms *de jure*. After a long development, by the time of the Antonines, cults of exotic origin were given a more thoroughly Roman form, including

⁹³ See the list of equivalences in Pépin, *Mythe*, 504 ff. ⁹⁴ Beard *et al.*, *Religions*, 61 and *passim*.

⁹⁵ On the formulation of doctrine and mythology in terms of social complexity, see Wach, *Sociology*, 21 f.

⁹⁶ Scheid and Svenbro, 'Götternamen', 196 f.

even the self-castration of the priests of certain cults being integrated into a Roman ritual context, all the while preserving original features of iconography and ritual, especially marked with the cult of Isis.⁹⁷ What followed was an accelerated and more substantive spread of cults of eastern origin through the empire, not from their eastern lands of origin, but from Rome and as Roman cults,⁹⁸ and then fairly sparingly.⁹⁹

There had indeed been 'an explosion' of oriental cult images on civic coins under Rome and in the capital, sometimes with betylic representations of divinities;¹⁰⁰ imperial Rome contained seventy-one sanctuaries of oriental deities.¹⁰¹ Deities were brought to western parts of the empire by Syrian soldiers serving in the Roman legions.¹⁰² This in itself may have been a phenomenon restricted largely to specific garrisons. But it did display a more general phenomenon and a thorough syncretism. Jupiter Dolichenus, associating Jupiter with the Baal of Commagene, had been brought into Germany by soldiers, Syrians in the main, and he became not only a kind of patron deity of the Rhineland, but a Jupiter Optimus Maximus as well, with Juno Regina as his companion, much as was the case with Jupiter Heliopolitanus of Baalbek. Like him, he adopted Roman epicleses of Jupiter, such as *felix*, *augustus*¹⁰³ and *dominus*, participating in the majesty of the Roman Jupiter, albeit with an oriental iconography.¹⁰⁴ His sanctuary on the Aventine in Rome also housed Mithras, Diana, Apollo, and representations of Isis and Serapis.¹⁰⁵

Perhaps more importantly, Roman emperors had developed tastes for deities of exotic oriental provenance; the Roman senatorial class lagged behind, and expressed a consequent interest in this only from the fourth century.¹⁰⁶ But here again, we see a substantive syncretism, impelled by an assertive central authority, at once political and religious, that of the Pontifex Maximus. Hadrian (r. 117–138), for instance – preceded elsewhere by Seleucus and others – sacrificed to the betylic Zeus at Mount Cassius in

⁹⁷ Belayche, 'Deae Syriae', 569 ff. Magna Mater was brought in earlier, the Sybilline Oracle having predicted that the foreign enemy would leave Rome when she arrived from Phrygia: Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*, 67.

⁹⁸ Beard *et al.*, *Religions*, 337.

⁹⁹ Belayche ('Deae Syriae', 577) notes that the presence of the Mithraeum in Caesarea (Palestine) was unusual in a province where Oriental cults were not diffused. But one needs to note the presence of other Mithraea, in Doura Europus and elsewhere in Syria.

¹⁰⁰ Butcher, *Roman Syria*, 336 ff. On betyls, see the extensive review in 'Agioi lithoi' and 'Baetylia', *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*.

¹⁰¹ Beard *et al.*, *Religions*, 260 ff. and maps 2 and 3. ¹⁰² Turcan, *Cults*, 132 ff., 140, 169, 171 ff.

¹⁰³ The word itself, prior to Octavian, was an epithet used especially for places consecrated by augurs, and was used to evoke divine favours: Beard *et al.*, *Religions*, 182.

¹⁰⁴ Belayche, 'Deae Syriae', 580 ff. ¹⁰⁵ Beard *et al.*, *Religions*, 281.

¹⁰⁶ Beard *et al.*, *Religions*, 291, 381 ff.

Syria, at a specific point in a cultic calendar that corresponded to what later was to become Advent, and at a site which was later to become a church dedicated to St George.¹⁰⁷ Aurelian (r. 270–275), after his defeat of Zenobia at Emesa in 274, celebrated his victory at the local temple of Elagabalus,¹⁰⁸ certifying at once both divine equivalence and the deity of the location. Quite apart from such matters, and they are legion, a general syncretism involving Syrian, Egyptian and Phrygian deities was quite widespread. This often followed changes in imperial taste. An inscription in the baths of Caracalla (r. 211–217) in Rome, dedicated to Zeus Serapis Helios, was changed in 217 by hammering out the name of Serapis and substituting that of Mithras for it.¹⁰⁹ For his part, Elagabalus (r. 218–222), the grandson of Caracalla's Syrian maternal aunt Julia Maesa, assimilated Syrian Baal to Jupiter, and Juno Caelestis to Tannit and her consort to Sol, having imported the god Elagabalus wholesale, with due procession, from Emesa to Rome.¹¹⁰

More generally, Isiac syncretism was extremely widely disseminated, drawing the attachment even of an emperor like Diocletian (r. 284–305), well known for his conservatism in religious matters.¹¹¹ Isis was assimilated to Aphrodite and Astarte, to Demeter, Rhea and Hestia in Greece, to Cybele in Thrace, and was regarded as unique and many-named, a 'numen unicum multiformi specie',¹¹² worshipped under bewilderingly manifold local forms and names whose seeming incongruity, 'breathing forth the spices of pleasant Arabia', lent itself to biting satire.¹¹³

Other supra-regional, ultimately imperial divinities were also many-named, although it must be stressed that these were divinities of an imperial religious system, not central imperial deities with a remit or priesthoods beyond the local.¹¹⁴ Zeus was polyonymous from very early on, having many names, often doubling as functional attributes: father, thunderer and others.¹¹⁵ So also Jupiter, appearing as Jupiter Optimus Maximus, Jupiter Victor or Jupiter Salus.¹¹⁶ Similarly, the Babylonian Mardūk had fifty names,¹¹⁷ and Allāh was to have nearly twice as many. Zeus in the

¹⁰⁷ Haddād and Majā'is, *Ba'l Hadad*, 130; Turcan, *Cults*, 132.

¹⁰⁸ Millar, *Roman Near East*, 172 f. ¹⁰⁹ Turcan, *Cults*, 93.

¹¹⁰ Turcan, *Cults*, 176 ff.; Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 193. ¹¹¹ Turcan, *Cults*, 122.

¹¹² Turcan, *Cults*, 80 ff., 88 ff.; Dunand, 'Syncretisme', 89 and *passim*.

¹¹³ Apuleius, *Golden Ass*, 237 f.

¹¹⁴ For this distinction, see the extraordinarily clear characterisation of Roman religions in their various phases from the time of Augustus, by Cancik, 'System und Entwicklung', 374 f. and *passim*.

¹¹⁵ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 40 and *passim*.

¹¹⁶ See Scheid, 'Hiérarchie et structure', 200.

¹¹⁷ *Babylonian Genesis*, tablets vi and vii, *passim*. Very many names – often associated with functions – were given to Odin as well, often by different peoples: Sturluson, *Edda*, 15 f., 33f.

Hauran in southern Syria could receive many different epithets in the same locality.¹¹⁸

It is unsurprising that Jupiter received special attention under conditions of the Roman empire. In Roman Syria in particular, he – like Zeus in his own right, and very persistently under his own name – was assimilated to a variety of local deities and dubbed with many epithets appropriate to these deities. This assimilation was officiated in a manner that, typical of the time, combined Latin names and official epithets with the Greek *oecumenical* religious koine as well as with local, Aramaic and Syriac ones: *aniketos* (the invincible), *megistos* (the greatest), *megistos hypsistos* (the most high), *kyrios* (the lord – an oriental epithet equivalent to Adonai and Baal), *epikarpios* (the producer of fruit), *soter* (the saviour), *phosphoros* (the luminous), *teleios*, Māralāha (lord of the gods – Syriac), *mr' 'lm* (lord of the world and of eternity – Aramaic), and others.¹¹⁹ In Beirut, he was assimilated to Baal, Poseidon and Baal Berit and, not least, to the local cult-object at Baalbek, Jupiter Optimus Maximus Heliopolitanus,¹²⁰ towards whose sanctuary, one of the most impressive in the Roman world, successive Roman emperors were unstintingly generous.

This was a deity, generally assimilated to Zeus, whose remit was truly imperial, and whose cosmic attributes as written into his iconography – full frontal representation, cuirassed, with epaulettes and shoulder armour, bearing a thunderbolt, with surrounding ears of corn, astral mantle and eagles – were almost universally syncretised.¹²¹ Yet for practical purposes, his personality and those of other gods with whom he was associated were ultimately interchangeable.¹²² Moreover, Jupiter, as a generic, great supra-celestial deity and without reference to the cult of Baalbek, under the guise of Zeus Ouranios/Jupiter Caelestis, was assimilated in the Fertile Crescent to Baalshamīn, Lord of the Sky, and ultimately became the Jupiter *summus exsuperantissimus* for whom the emperor Commodus (r. 180–192) had a special inclination.¹²³ He was later to be identified with Sol Invictus by Constantine (r. 306–337).

Mention of the sun as a deity brings to mind the Ḥarrānian religion, and leads us to phenomena of sub-imperial extension. In this astral religion, the sun was identified with Helios, Saturn with Chronos, Mars with Ares,

¹¹⁸ Sourdel, *Cultes*, 28.

¹¹⁹ Sourdel, *Cultes*, 22 ff.; Cumont, *Oriental Religions*, 132; Kaizer, *Religious Life*, 160; Segal, 'Pagan Syriac monuments', 116.

¹²⁰ Hall, *Berytus*, 129 ff. ¹²¹ Turcan, *Cults*, 149 ff. ¹²² Cumont, *Oriental Religions*, 132.

¹²³ Turcan, *Cults*, 171 ff., 193; Sourdel, *Cultes*, 19 ff.; Kaizer, *Religious Life*, 86; Cumont, *Oriental Religions*, 127 f.; Cumont, 'Jupiter', 323 ff.

Venus with Balti, Mercury with Nabūq, and Jupiter with Bel.¹²⁴ And while the solar cult in a region such as Hauran was not as ancient, dates only from the fourth century AD, and was generally of local salience, yet theophoric names involving the sun in the form of Zeus Helios were legion in southern Syria.¹²⁵

Finally, the brief account preceding and to follow will, it is hoped, place us well to go beyond the production of bizarre or otherwise exotic lists, and to look into the regular patterns that structure syncretism and render it, as suggested above, written into polytheism, and into the ways in which such regular patterns help us understand the emergence of monotheism overall. All the while, it cannot be over-emphasised that such syncretism and such associations and shifts in association between deities and their names and epithets arise from the simple fact that the nature of a divinity broadens as the number of its votaries increases.¹²⁶ This does not imply the common opinion that the phenomenon was only a veneer overlaying oriental deities and cults, or that syncretised deities are thereby ‘confused’.¹²⁷ The perspective adopted here argues, rather, that at a particular time and under cosmopolitan conditions of the Hellenistic and late antique ages, Hellenism – and by imperial association, Romanity – was the medium through which local cults were subjected to an *aggiornamento*.¹²⁸

In Aramaean Syria, ‘Ashtart, under the slightly different name Atar‘ate (Atargatis to the Greeks and Romans), appears to have been a later expression of what is usually taken for an elemental, protective and procreative mother-goddess.¹²⁹ Impressive figurines from the eighth through to the second millennium BC still exist in Syrian museums, from the basic and crude to those constructed according to variously elaborate iconographies.¹³⁰ She was later generically termed Dea Syria by Roman and Greek authors, and known under a masculine aspect in south Arabia as ‘Athtar; she appeared as Ishtar in Mesopotamia, ‘Ashtar in Palmyra and ‘Atar elsewhere in Syria.¹³¹ According to mythological narratives, she was wedded to the Aramaean deity Hadad, the two assimilated to Hera and her consort to Zeus, while among the Nabataeans, Palmyrenes, Edessans

¹²⁴ Segal, ‘Pagan Syriac monuments’, 112.

¹²⁵ Sourdel, *Cultes*, 53, 57 f. ¹²⁶ Cumont, *Oriental Religions*, 131.

¹²⁷ Cumont, *Oriental Religions*, 132; Turcan, *Cults*, 7; Sartre, *Orient romain*, 496.

¹²⁸ Bowersock, *Hellenism*, 7–9.

¹²⁹ This bears comparison with the later Marian cult: Benko, *Virgin Goddess*, ch. 1.

¹³⁰ *Syrie. Mémoire et civilisation*, 46 f. and pls. 16 (Aleppo Museum, Inv. Mb. 73–1; m. 10165), 17 (Aleppo Museum, Inv. Mb. 73–4; m. 1009), 61 (Damascus National Museum, Inv. m. 9), 70 (Aleppo Museum, Inv. m. 1117), 71 (Aleppo Museum, Inv. m. 1288), 72 (Aleppo Museum, Inv. m. 1289), 113 (Damascus National Museum, Inv. s. 2366), 122 (Aleppo Museum, Inv. m. 7970), 152 (Idlib Museum, Inv. TM 83 G. 220).

¹³¹ Henninger, ‘Problem der Venusgottheit’, 152 ff.

and Arabs on the fringes of the Fertile Crescent her protective attributes were transferred to al-‘Uzzā, variously identified with Aphrodite or Athena, according to time and location. Al-‘Uzzā’s rival and occasional companion Allāt, the most ubiquitous of all Arab deities, was also assimilated to ‘Ashtart.¹³²

These syncretistic deities came occasionally to draw upon vast social constituencies, and activated syncretism at points of application. In the second century AD, the famous temple at Hierapolis (Manbij in today’s northern Syria), constructed according to Ionian models, drew pilgrims from ‘Arabia’, Phoenicia, Cappadocia, Assyria and Cilicia, who, one presumes, worshipped a variety of local deities whose statues were erected according to a modified Greek iconographic programme: Dea Syria as Atargatis, ‘Ashtart, Anat and Asherah, Zeus as Baal Haddu, represented as an unusually bearded Apollo, in fact a syncretic Apollo-Nabū of the Greek type.¹³³ The Hierapolitan statue of Hera incorporated iconographic elements drawn from a variety of deities: Athena, Aphrodite, Selene, Rhea, Artemis and Nemesis.¹³⁴ The identification of Heracles with Melqart and his Sidonian equivalent Ashmūn was common in all areas which, in southern Syria, were in direct contact with Phoenicia, particularly the Transjordanian Decapolis, and to a somewhat lesser extent in Palmyra.¹³⁵

In certain parts inhabited by Arabs, across the whole expanse of northern Mesopotamia and the edges of the Arabian desert, especially at Edessa, Emesa and Palmyra, later developments saw Venus, when identified by her astral apparition, come to be associated with ‘Azīzu and Mun‘imu (Azizos and Monimos to Greek and Latin authors, later al-‘Azīz and al-Mun‘im to the Arabs), identified respectively with Phosphoros and Hesperos, the morning and evening star, although the feminine aspect of this deity remained predominant overall.¹³⁶ So much, at least, for an *interpretatio graeca*. ‘Azīzu was also, and very often, represented, as at Edessa and Palmyra, in a protective martial aspect, iconographically appearing on horseback carrying a lance.¹³⁷ He also appeared in the cosmocratic aspect of an eagle.¹³⁸ He was carried by Syrian soldiers in the armies of Rome, and

¹³² Starcky, ‘Allath’, 120 f., 126, and pl. 1/2.

¹³³ Bounni, ‘Nabū palmyrénien’, 50; other iconographic types of this deity are the local Palmyrenian and the ‘Graeco-Oriental’.

¹³⁴ Lucian, *Dea Syria*, §§ 4, 10, 30 ff., 35. ¹³⁵ Sourdél, *Cultes*, 33, 35.

¹³⁶ Cf. Sourdél, *Cultes*, 120; Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs*, 147 ff., 159 f.; Henninger, ‘Problem der Venusgottheit’, 155; Fahd, *Panthéon*, 254; Albright, *Yahweh*, 117.

¹³⁷ *LIMC*, III/1: 69–71, III/2: s.v. Azizos, pl. 1, 2; Drijvers, *Religion of Palmyra*, pls. LXIII/2, LXIV/2, LXVIII/1.

¹³⁸ *LIMC*, III/2: s.v. Azizos, pl. 5.

dedications from the second and third centuries to *Deus Azizus bonus puer conservator* appear in Dacia and Pannonia,¹³⁹ as do indeed dedications to other Arab deities there and elsewhere, such as Greek inscriptions in Rome dedicated to Baal and the Palmyrene Yarhibôl as *theoi patrooi*.¹⁴⁰ There was a dedication to Allât in Cordoba.¹⁴¹ Mun'imu is equally represented in Palmyra under a martial aspect, on horseback with spear and quiver,¹⁴² as were indeed other unnamed and rough-hewn Arab gods in the desert around Palmyra.¹⁴³

As the evidence adduced suggests, Syria, Phoenicia and Arabia (in which I include both the Provincia Arabia of the Roman imperial administration and the edges of the Fertile Crescent separating the desert from the sown and verging on both, inhabited mostly by Arabs – the 'Barbarian Plain'¹⁴⁴) became for the purposes of supra-local culture and communication bilingual, and to a large degree Hellenised. This is evident from vigorous naming and associating local and foreign deities, after the more sporadic practices of renaming and association practised by Syrians, Phoenicians and others resident in Greece and other parts of the empire.¹⁴⁵ For all Egypt's renowned insularity, Hellenistic Egyptian texts, written by and for Greek Alexandrians, equated Bacchus with Osiris and with the Adonis of western Semites.¹⁴⁶ Plutarch noted that the statue of a seated Athena at Saïs in Egypt is thought locally to have been not the Athenian deity but the indigenous Isis.¹⁴⁷ Finally, in the course of the second century AD, Yahweh became identified with Zeus, the Theos Hypsistos who had already been worshipped, along with Augustus, by Herod, and an altar for him was erected in place of the altar of burnt offerings in Jerusalem¹⁴⁸ – an identification altogether common between Zeus, Jupiter and the great generic cosmocratic god of all Semitic peoples, Baal, with the personal names Hadad among the Aramaeans and Anū among the Babylonians.¹⁴⁹

Baal, it must be assumed, became 'great' once he had become the deity of instances who had the capacity to dispose of a priestly or quasi-priestly class who composed mythographies and mythologies. Like his analogues, he was often represented in the cosmocratic aspect as an eagle,¹⁵⁰ and in

¹³⁹ Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs*, 172 ff. ¹⁴⁰ Février, *Religion*, 53; Ensoli, 'Communauté et cultes'.

¹⁴¹ Cumont, 'Dédicade', 342 ff. ¹⁴² Starcky, 'Relief dédié au dieu Mun'im'.

¹⁴³ Drijvers, *Religion of Palmyra*, 22 and pl. LXIX. ¹⁴⁴ This is the title of Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*.

¹⁴⁵ Bikerman, 'Anonymous gods', 187 ff. ¹⁴⁶ Assmann, *Moses*, 52.

¹⁴⁷ Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, § 9: the iconography of the statue may indicate Athena, but the person of the deity – beyond syncretism – must remain in question.

¹⁴⁸ Dvornik, *Political Philosophy*, 558 f.; Hoffmann, 'Epilogue' to *Porphyrus*, 107.

¹⁴⁹ Among others, see Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs*, 47 ff.

¹⁵⁰ LIMC, s.v. Baalshamin, III/2, pl. 16 and III/1, 73 ff.; Drijvers, *Religion of Palmyra*, pl. xxxii.

his apotropaic and protective aspect was represented in martial form, most spectacularly in Palmyra.¹⁵¹ The great god also had important solar associations, iconographically expressed in figures of the sun and the moon, as well as the nimbus, which was later to be transposed into Christian representations of holiness.¹⁵² One of the clearest illustrations of this kind of transposition is perhaps a fifth-century image of St Sergius which showed him on horseback, with a nimbus, wearing military attire. Possibly of Palestinian origin, and probably belonging to the monastery of St Sergius at al-Ruṣāfa, this figure carried over the iconography and protective associations of 'Azīzu as depicted for centuries between Ḥawrān and Aleppo.¹⁵³

Polytheistic transitions

Two major issues emerge from the instances cited. The first is that, in speaking of the particular and the general in religion, the image that becomes possible to construe is that of a generic congruence at the various points of application, spreading over vast spaces, however particular their histories, and whatever measure of autochthony we wish to ascribe to them. This generic unity arises from an anthropological uniformity of cultic activity, however disparate the names, however developed or undeveloped the mythographies and syncretisms, a uniformity structured ultimately by the relationship to a sublime presence and its kratophanic capacity. It might be noted that, in the context of nominative migration and expansion – or contraction – of the sphere of action of a particular divinity, names tend to be faithless to their origins, and, when not attached to centralising instances, attract epithets and other names promiscuously, as they do kratophanic functions that might not have attached to them originally. When divine names are attached to centralising or otherwise coordinating instances, they acquire official elaborations, such as, for instance, the Hellenisation of Roman deities in Sybilline Books, and in iconographic translations as well.¹⁵⁴

The second major feature emerging from this very copious epigraphic, iconographic and literary material concerns association and assimilation, and this leads us to a closer consideration of syncretism. This is the *association* of various deities to each other, according to local form, and under the title of major deities, and the cultic and, usually but not necessarily later, the *assimilation* of local deities under the name of a greater god or a Great God,

¹⁵¹ Drijvers, *Religion of Palmyra*, pl. xxxiv; Seyrig, 'Nouveaux monuments', 29 ff.

¹⁵² Cf. Février, *Religion*, 54 f; Seyrig, 'Antiquités syriennes, 93', 363.

¹⁵³ Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 35 ff., 40 ff. ¹⁵⁴ Wissowa, 'Interpretatio Romana', 8.

this greatness measured by that particular great deity's social and political dominance correlative with those of his or her acolytes, and expressed in the changing order of ritual sacrifice, as is evident from Roman syncretism; hierarchy is connected to context.¹⁵⁵ Isis in Rome and Egypt, Baal-Zeus in Semitic lands, Mithras throughout the empire, especially among the military, are cases in point, as were also Yahweh, the Christian *ho theos*/Deus, and, later, Allāh. Both phenomena, manifested in polyonymy, would seem to account for the observation that Syrians and Phoenicians practised a 'theological agnosticism' regarding the names of their deities, giving them epithets related to the toponyms, naming local cults after their locations of occurrence, or giving them Greek divine names and titles.¹⁵⁶

The primary analytical distinction here appears to be one between proper name and abstract function that might be expressed in the epithet or epiclesis. We have seen that functions, including a generalised kratophany that is not confined to specific functions such as rain-making, law-giving or protection, can also be assigned to nouminous presences bereft of a name. Moreover, equivalent functional capacities might be attributed to a variety of nouminous persons, or be attached as epithets to a variety of divine persons. The medley of homonyms indicated in Greek mythology, for instance, would indicate the local salience of a more general phenomenon, and naming by the use of epithets indicates an implicit personalisation.¹⁵⁷ At the second order of analysis, such a medley would indicate deliberate reflection, mythographic literarisation or theological elaboration, beyond the immediate requirements of cultic activity¹⁵⁸ – discursive elaboration, but not necessarily sheer 'poetic invention'.¹⁵⁹

But at the elementary level with which we are concerned, endowing a divinity with a name amounts to building a specific category of divinity,¹⁶⁰ specific as to its personal incursions into the domains of other divinities, sometimes mythographically expressed in terms of an explicit or implicit theomachy. But this cannot arise without social processes and the politico-cultural dominance of certain regions or groups over others or their interactions with them. Thus arises the phenomenon, altogether common, where a variety of deities might be gathered together as aspects, or epithets, or indeed multiple proper names of a deity which has come to acquire their functions and cults. The Hebrew Tetragrammaton had already divulged His name variously to different prophets, or declared

¹⁵⁵ Scheid, 'Hiérarchie et structure', 190 ff., 199. ¹⁵⁶ Bickerman, 'Anonymous gods', p. 191.

¹⁵⁷ Usener, *Götternamen*, 29, 218 f. ¹⁵⁸ Cassirer, *Sprache und Mythos*, 2.

¹⁵⁹ Thus Dodds, *Greeks*, 9 ff. ¹⁶⁰ Cassirer, *Sprache und Mythos*, 5.

Himself to be homonymous with names already current,¹⁶¹ in a move that might be seen as an incipient passage from mythology to theology, with He declaring Himself to be He, *ho On*, theologically speaking.¹⁶² But it should be noted that this phenomenon is not confined to a transference of names. What were transferred were indeed names; but they were also functions and epicleses; we see transferences among personal names, from personal to nameless gods, from nameless deities to others with personal names which might indeed be derived from epithets and epicleses. In all cases, names, common, proper or expressive of function, and epithets as well, are transferable in that they act, primarily as synecdoches, to express primary kratophanic capacities at concrete points of application.¹⁶³

In all cases, a divine name itself came to carry the noumenal majesty and energy of He who might bodily dwell in heaven, while his Name dwelt in the Temple.¹⁶⁴ The utterance of the name should not necessarily imply that its enunciation be a hypostasis of the divinity, or that the sound of the name itself might be consubstantial with it: what it does do is unlock a kratophanic potency, and render it sympathetic to the votary, the priest, the magician or the thaumaturgue. This is well attested in the vast Muslim and Jewish literature on the Great Name of God,¹⁶⁵ often construed in terms of gematria and of letter-magic – according to the well-known Muslim legend, King Solomon had this Great Name engraved on his ring, which allowed him domination over forces both natural and preternatural. Origen held the names of deities to be untranslatable on account of the potency of their precise enunciation. The multiplication of names given to a specific divine person adds energy to all others assimilated or associated with this person, collectively and singularly, transferring the energies of the one to the other.¹⁶⁶

In all cases, we have association and assimilation, singly or together, producing cultic multivalence or a cultic system of subordination, competition and parity at points of application, depending on the cultic constituencies involved. Assimilation involved the mutual transferability of the functional prerogatives and characteristics of divinity. Such functions were, in a manner whose stability or instability depended on the relations between the respective bodies of votaries, connected with the socio-religious geography of cultic location. They involved a process in which *nomen*, *numen*

¹⁶¹ Exodus, 3.14, 6.3; Numbers 23.8 ff., 24.4, 8, 16; cf. Usener, *Götternamen*, 216 ff.

¹⁶² Bottéro, *Mésopotamie*, 261; Dodd, *Bible*, 4. ¹⁶³ Cf. Scheid, 'Hiérarchie et structure', 199 ff.

¹⁶⁴ Stroumsa, 'Nameless god', 231.

¹⁶⁵ Al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought*, 95 f.

¹⁶⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, v. 45; Cassirer, *Sprache und Mythos*, 40 f., 51. It is interesting to note the parallelism of conjuring a deity by an utterance with Yahweh's creation of the universe by the utterance of the imperative 'be'.

and epithets were sometimes interchangeable or otherwise transferable.¹⁶⁷ Assimilation indicated that this mutuality, usually described as syncretism, was no longer operative, and that the social force of one divinity, especially when sustained and promoted by a central political instance, had become so overwhelming as to result in subordination, or even in the obliteration of the socially or politically subordinate deity. It indicates that, once having run its potential course, a horizontal transference takes place between gods, formally abjuring and cultically eradicating all but one, leading to a vertical transference in which an indivisible divine remit is lodged in a particular name such as Yahweh or Allāh, obliterating the distinction of divine persons endowed with special functions (such as fortune or protection), locations or personal names, and allocating all supra-mundane functions to one person only. Vestigially, demons, benign or malign, remain on the noumenal register, following a hierarchical or binary, and sometimes dualistic, reorganisation of the supernatural realm.

In the process of monotheising assimilation just sketched, the various *nomena*, attributes or functions of divinity are enfolded into the one exclusive divine person, as his or her attributes, polyonymous manifestations or both. In the model of interpretation here suggested, subaltern divinities are not the result of devolution, but the elementary components of a later composition out of which a supreme deity was to emerge. It is not necessary to make any assumptions of an *Urmonotheismus*.¹⁶⁸

Once mythography attendant upon the organisational and acculturating possibilities of social, political and cultic expansion and elaboration are in place, a movement towards the distinctive paths of monolatry, henotheism and monotheism becomes possible. Theonyms, as well as functional and toponymic epithets, when not rejected, are assimilated into the ultimate noumenon, who acts personally, ultimately without restriction and virtually without mediation except for that of messengers mundane (prophets) and supra-mundane (angels), as He does in the limiting case of the omnipotent god of the Old Testament and of the Qur'ān. The twin movements of cultic centralisation, to the exclusion of other divinities admissible in monolatry and henotheism, and of the indivisible ontological transcendence of the one divinity, make monotheism possible. In this process, the remnants of earlier religions, including dethroned deities commonly termed demons, generally become generic, their proper names bivalently doubling

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Février, *Religion*, 6.

¹⁶⁸ For this notion in connection with conceptions of polytheism and the widening remit of conceptions of deity from the sixteenth into the nineteenth century, see Graf, *Missbrauchte Götter*, 33 ff.

as common names. The decisive difference between them and gods is that the latter possess cults, often ones that had earlier pertained to demoted divinities. Cult, including the cult of anonymous gods, individualises, and ultimately calls for the naming; in religions bereft of durable theological elaboration, naming becomes 'der Ganze Inhalt ihrer Offenbarung',¹⁶⁹ the epicletic conjuration of the *Augenblicksgott*.

These later developments, it has been suggested, would not have been possible had they not been associated with cults sponsored by higher political and social instances, which organised the terms of inter-divine translatability and eventually gave way to state-sponsored religions: cults patronised by Seleucids, Ptolemies and Romans, progressively wedded, particularly from the fourth century AD onwards, to subordinationist, Neo-Platonic, rationalising notions of supreme divinity who may devolve functions and prerogatives to subordinate deities.¹⁷⁰ The favour shown Isis is well known. This cosmocratic deity, in various degrees and ways transcendent with respect to other gods, and often construed as ineffable and supra-celestial, had attributes that served to distinguish her somewhat from other deities, attributes which also intersected with theirs.¹⁷¹

It was often the case, however, that this generalisation of divine remit came in association with local deities who were thus elevated into œcumenical generality: Zeus-Ammon, Zeus-Manāf, for instance, given epithets and attributes of these lesser deities, such as *soter*, *phosphoros* or, more concretely with reference to agricultural fertility, *epikarpios*¹⁷² – all of these attributes were later to have Qur'ānic cognates with reference to Allāh. In certain places, Baalshamin preserved his micro-sociological, tutelary aspect, of individuals as of social groups.¹⁷³ Similarly, the ubiquitous Zeus Patroos, Zeus Damaskenos, associated with Hadad, and the Zeus Heliopolitanus who travelled with Roman legions throughout the empire, as well as the

¹⁶⁹ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 213 and 148, 212 f., and cf. Décobert, 'Conversion'.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Chadwick, 'Introduction' to Origen, *Contra Celsum*, xvii f. On the long history of these theological elaborations, arising from natural philosophy, and on their not being incompatible with polytheism, see Vesnel, 'Thrice one', 91 ff. Nock ('Oracles') notes a number of oracular texts from Apollo of Claros, Apollo of Didyma (both in Ionia), and others connected with the name of Hecate, similar in style to the Chaldaean and Sibylline Oracles, and reports of three dedications from Brittany, Dalmatia and North Africa, in which deities are seen as aspects of a single one. This is of course in line with the inroads of middle Platonism into religious representations. But none of these theological oracles need justify an assumption of active and consequential monotheism (as with Athanassiadi, 'The gods'), as they do not take account of any but a token distinction between the cultic and the philosophical and theological aspects, practices, constituencies and settings of religion, or of the morphology of divinity. The same would apply to Hypsitarianism.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Vesnel, 'Thrice one', 132 ff. ¹⁷² Sourdél, *Cultes*, 22 ff. ¹⁷³ Sourdél, *Cultes*, 19 ff.

later Qur'ānic Allāh as *rabb al-bayt*, are of the same order. The association of the deity with His House is a very old one, already signalled with reference to Yahweh in the post-exilic period, but already familiar in Mesopotamia, without this concrete residence in any way precluding an existence 'on high'.¹⁷⁴ It seems that the later iconography of Baalshamīn, bearing a spear, may have been inspired by that of Baalbek's Jupiter Heliopolitanus,¹⁷⁵ but also harks back to the Phoenician Smiting God, and the fearsomely kratophanic notion of divinity he embodies,¹⁷⁶ just as other divinities embody this notion with their iconographic associations with eagles, sun-discs and thunderbolts.

What needs to be noted here, crucially for the discussion of Arab religions, is that attributes of singularity and elevation (*theos hypsistos*, *al-'Alī*, *Elyon*) should not, in a polytheistic universe, be seen to indicate monotheistic worship or incipient monotheism. The point has been argued in detail that the empire-wide worship of a nameless *theos hypsistos* indicates a sort of hypsistarian religion running parallel to the development of Christianity and with possible interfaces with Jews or Judaisers, in which *hypsistos* was more than a common epithet but indicates a stricter theological connotation.¹⁷⁷ No conclusion was drawn that this cult held a rigorously exclusive conception of divinity.¹⁷⁸ What needs to be kept in mind is that attributes such as *hypsistos*, which betokens both physical distance, possibly transcendence as well and superlativeness, and *heis*, which betokens uniqueness that might slide from acclamation at the cultic moment to conceptual uniqueness,¹⁷⁹ are not functional epithets, do not imply monolatry, and do not betoken ritual rupture with conventional polytheistic worship.¹⁸⁰ It would seem, on available evidence and from the analysis of polytheistic structures, that this will have been an instance of henotheism, where one deity is worshipped by a preference that might hold only for the occasion of worship, excluding neither the existence nor the worship of other deities.

¹⁷⁴ Bottéro, *Mésopotamie*, 383. ¹⁷⁵ Dussaud, *Pénétration*, 98.

¹⁷⁶ *La Méditerranée des Phéniciens*, pls. 140 (American University of Beirut Museum, Inv. 2617), 141 (Cyprus Museum, Nicosia, Inv. CM 1945/V-28/1); *Land des Baal*, pl. 122 (Damascus National Museum, Inv. Sh. 3372 [RS. 23.393] – the same is reproduced in colour in *Syrie. Mémoire et civilisation*, pl. 178).

¹⁷⁷ Mitchell, 'Further thoughts'. ¹⁷⁸ Mitchell, 'Further thoughts', 180.

¹⁷⁹ Peterson, *EIS ΘΕΟΣ*, 305; Belayche, 'Hypsistos', 35, 43; 'Deus deum', 163, 166; Vesnel, 'Thrice one', 130 f.

¹⁸⁰ Belayche, 'Hypsistos', 41, 49 f., who proposes (35 f.) that such a monotheising interpretation may very well be coloured by *hypsistos* having been used to render the Elyon in the Septuagint, and by philosophical inflections.

The sublimation of fetishism

It has been proposed that a transcendent deity, endowed with an anthropopathic personality, is the 'ultimate residual anthropomorphism'¹⁸¹ emerging from cultic sympathies and kratophanies. Credence is lent to this interpretation by considering the self-conscious and explicit interpretation of icons by Byzantine iconodules, who provided what was perhaps the clearest indications of the icons' anthropological functions.¹⁸² Addressing the icon with veneration transfers this veneration to the archetype through its figure,¹⁸³ a figure which designates without describing;¹⁸⁴ designation in this process amounts to invocation and conjures up presence, when expressed verbally in terms of an address. Such address performs very much the same function as one performed directly before the archetype, as both icon and verbal expression belong to the overall category of *graphie*.¹⁸⁵ Transferability between media is written into the system.

This was itself in line with pagan philosophical thinking about, and interpretation of, the confluence of divinity, however ethereally or abstractly conceived, and cult-object. The conception of sympathy between hallowed objects, verbal, ethereal or visual, was elaborated by Porphyry in a way that showed a concordance between philosophical cognition and divine oracles. Plotinian metaphysics in its way sublimated the magical aspect of polytheistic divinities, such that an anagogic notion of cult-object could be connected conceptually with Hermetism.¹⁸⁶ In a parallel development, Christian worship of Christ in his various, eucharistic and iconic manifestations was elaborated theologically in philosophical terms.¹⁸⁷ It should be remembered that Plotinus himself very likely performed wondrous actions, and participated in magical practices.¹⁸⁸

It is the intention of this discussion not to delve into the details of late antique philosophical developments, but to highlight one nexus of philosophy and religion which was to have a determinate influence on the formation of both Christian monotheism and of a theology of the

¹⁸¹ *ER*, 1.317, and see *ERE*, 1.573. ¹⁸² Freedberg, *Power*, 395 ff.

¹⁸³ For instance, the views of Chrysostom and of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite; texts in St John of Damascus, *Divine Images*, 91, 93.

¹⁸⁴ Zoubouli, 'Esthétique', 81.

¹⁸⁵ St John of Damascus, *Divine Images*, 'Apology 1', §§ 13, 17; Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning*, 47. See also Cassirer, *Symbolic Forms*, 1.190 f; Belting, *Likeness*, 150.

¹⁸⁶ Fowden, *Hermes*, 214 f. ¹⁸⁷ Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles*, 8, 68 ff., 157 ff., and ch. III, *passim*.

¹⁸⁸ Fowden, *Hermes*, 129, 133; see overall Thorndike, *History of Magic*, 299 ff., 310 ff. For a defence of Plotinus against charges of irrationalism: Dodds, *Greeks*, 286 f. For magical and theurgic actions by Proclus and his Athenian students, Cameron, 'Last days', 10.

imperial office that arose in connection with it. Reflection upon transcendence built upon the increasing theological abstraction of divinity at the hands of middle and late Neo-Platonic philosophers, thus paving the way to henotheism, with monotheism as a possible horizon. Henotheistic developments – and henotheism ebbed and flowed cultically and mythically long before its philosophical elaborations in Late Antiquity – are an analytically most useful matter to consider as we discuss the regular structures of syncretisation between names, epithets and cults.

One need not go into the debates over henotheism here,¹⁸⁹ but merely register its incidence and characteristics bereft of any notions of developmental inevitability.¹⁹⁰ We can get a measure of this whole movement by considering Baalshamīn. Even in places where he had been secondary initially, such as Palmyra, perhaps servicing an expatriate community, he was to acquire centrality there from around AD 134.¹⁹¹ The site of his cult was later consecrated as a church¹⁹² after his sublime presence had been fused with the transcendent god of gods and of men recognisable in monotheism. In a conceptually similar movement, one may note as a token of specific detail that Shalmat, daughter of the Edessan patrician Ma'nu, who came to marry King Agbar and is credited with having introduced Christianity as the official religion of the city in c. 204, had previously supplicated to Mārālāhā, Mār Elāhē, Aramaic for Chief God, who appears in Edessa and Hatra to have been identified with the moon god Sin.¹⁹³

This process of abstraction and unification was very old. For one thing, the organisation of panthea along a monarchic model was ancient, presumably with origins in Mesopotamia and Egypt where, as in the Old Testament, subsidiary divinities were retained as 'lackeys' of a supreme deity.¹⁹⁴ The formation in classical Greece of 'professional centers of truth', and Hellenistic Stoicism, was from the beginning connected with a criticism of myth and associated idolatrous worship, and sometimes with a sceptical and on occasion satirical attitude overall.¹⁹⁵ This was not always necessarily a debunking of myth, but often a rationalisation and philosophical allegorisation, sometimes but not always as a learned and urbane alternative to cultic practices and sacred narratives which were in any case,

¹⁸⁹ On which see especially Vesnel, 'Thrice one', 138 ff.

¹⁹⁰ See on these matters 'Henotheism', *ER*, 6.266 f., and 'Monolatry and henotheism', *ERE*, 8.810 f.

¹⁹¹ Dussaud, *Pénétration*, 20; Seyrig and Starcky, 'Nouveaux monuments', 32.

¹⁹² Drijvers, *Religion of Palmyra*, 15.

¹⁹³ Segal, 'Pagan Syriac monuments', 101 ff., 118; Drijvers and Healey, *Syriac Inscriptions*, 80.

¹⁹⁴ West, 'Towards monotheism', 24 f., 27.

¹⁹⁵ See overall Fredouille, 'Götzendienst', 831 f., 834 ff.

and as has been suggested, connected to religious practice at some social removes.¹⁹⁶ The contention that deities might be identified with their images, or that the myths woven around them, including the idea that the monotheistic God may suddenly decide to create or to destroy the world in a manner that is not in keeping with reason, was often held to be unseemly, incredible, frivolous and monstrous, and fit only for uneducated commoners.

Collaterally, a natural theology with political implications was worked out in terms of a Stoic theology combined with a sceptical Platonism. In a work dedicated to Julius Caesar as Pontifex Maximus, Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BC) developed a view which seems to have been not uncommonly held by educated Romans, and their cultured entourages and provincial extensions, that the *dei certi* were ultimately to be regarded as manifestations of Jupiter.¹⁹⁷ In this respect, theology could be divided, by ‘a wise economy’, into the mythical, the physical and the civil: the first cultivated by the poets, the second by the philosophers and the third by the magistrates.¹⁹⁸ This distinction echoes earlier, Hellenic notions of religious images as at once cultic and civic idols,¹⁹⁹ a view ultimately leading to the well-known mordant statement by Gibbon to the effect that in paganism gods were considered to be true by the common people, false by the philosophers and useful by the magistrates.

Varro’s division of theology has more than an antiquarian value and seems to have analytical utility as well. ‘Physical theology’ was to be conceptually organised and accelerated by Neo-Platonic philosophers, Syrians in the main. Numenius of Apamea (fl. second half of the second century AD) was one of the systematic initiators of this trend. He proposed a metaphysics in which the supreme deity, called *patros*, *pappos* and *basileus*, is an inactive First Intelligence, subsisting in a condition of stasis before coming to cause order, permanence and cosmic stability. Below him, in a manner in some ways consonant with that of the Gnostics, existed an active demiurgical principle, a *poetes* and *nomothetes*, in essence double, with two aspects, the one immanent and demiurgical, the other transcendent.²⁰⁰ This severe accentuation of the *basileus*’ transcendence created certain problems for

¹⁹⁶ Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe*, 17, 31, 43 ff. and ch. 5, *passim*; Pelikan, *Christianity*, 38; Dodds, *Greeks*, 180 ff.; Geffcken, ‘Bilderstreit’, 287 ff., 291 f.

¹⁹⁷ For the views of Varro: St Augustine, *City of God*, 4.4; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.12; Julian, *Works*, 2.325 ff; 1.12; Bevan, *Holy Images*, 74; Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 26 f.

¹⁹⁸ St Augustine, *City of God*, 4.9, 11, 6.5 ff., 7.27 ff.; Cancik and Cancik-Lindemaier, ‘Truth of images’, 43 ff.

¹⁹⁹ Finkelberg, ‘Two kinds’, 34 ff.

²⁰⁰ Dodds, ‘Numenius’, 12 and *passim*; Puech, ‘Numénus’, 755 ff., 763 ff.

later philosophers, but the schema formulated by Numenius left important sediments leading up to Iamblichus of Apamea (d. after 320), the emperor Julian's (r. 355–363) philosophical oracle, regarded by the latter as in no way inferior to Plato and Pythagoras.²⁰¹

Iamblichus developed the notion of a supra-celestial deity presiding over a complex cosmos, which had consequences pertinent to monotheism. It conjoined older cultic polytheism with the then new theurgical philosophy inspired by the Chaldaean Oracles:²⁰² a philosophy given a name which seemed to have been counterposed to theology, on the assumption that theurgy acted upon the gods while philosophy talked about them.²⁰³ It gave voice to the intellectual inarticulateness of the former, recognising the tenacity of the anthropologically elementary. It provided philosophy with a cultic, magical and social substratum inspired in part by Chaldaean astrolatry, and was reinforced by Mazdaean ethics, very much in vogue in Rome under the late empire.²⁰⁴ Thus, for Iamblichus, a synthesis of philosophy and Chaldaean wisdom, together with cultic observance, was achieved in such a manner that theorised the activation of theurgical prayer by sacrifices of supplication,²⁰⁵ with a novel austerity that may have been inspired by Christian worship.²⁰⁶

This was much in the spirit of imperial Hellenistic and later times, and is in some ways analogous to the restatement of Phoenician mythology by Philo of Byblos (d. 141) in terms of the Hesiodic scheme, but in a reverse geographical direction. It was also congruent with the Stoic expression of Egyptian religion, culturally insular as Egypt is generally held to have been.²⁰⁷ Iamblichus' 'sacramental theology',²⁰⁸ grounded in what in a slightly different context was referred to as an assumption of a 'pre-established identity' between Chaldaean mysteries and Platonic philosophy,²⁰⁹ provided the schema according to which might be conjoined, with varying degrees of rigour, the structure of Neo-Platonic cosmic schemes and a variety of named cultic deities. Thus for the emperor Julian, a not incompetent but not entirely accomplished philosopher-king with a definite and rigorous policy of rearguard religious defence of polytheism,

²⁰¹ Julian, *Works*, 1.399, 3.5; Malley, *Hellenism and Christianity*, 49 ff.

²⁰² Fowden, 'Polytheist religion', 545; Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles*, 78 ff.; Bowersock, *Hellenism*, 32.

²⁰³ Dodds, *Greeks*, 283 ff.

²⁰⁴ Among others, see Cumont, *Oriental Religions*, 89 f., 127, 134, 141; Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles*, 78 ff., 409 f., 417 f., and *passim*; Fowden, *Hermes*, 126, 129, 132 ff., 214 ff.; Koch, 'Empereur Julien', 517 ff., 530 ff.

²⁰⁵ Harl, 'Sacrifice', 11, 13. ²⁰⁶ Cameron, 'Last days', 15 f.

²⁰⁷ Wolfson, *Philo*, 1.6 ff.; Barr, 'Philo'; Bowersock, *Hellenism*, 55 f.

²⁰⁸ Fowden, 'Polytheist religion', 545. ²⁰⁹ Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles*, 312.

this conjunction, requiring a universalising perspective, was expressed as a defence of Hellenism, *Hellenismōs*. Hellenism had then become a universal language and culture of polytheism, execrated as such by many a bishop. It was decidedly imperial and disengaged from ethnic designation, and from the local realities of cult. He sought, simultaneously, to reverse some of the main trends of this universalism by restoring urban senatorial dignities which belonged to a previous age and which had a stronger hue of classical, Italic Romanity,²¹⁰ in a nostalgic or perhaps rhetorical mode.

Be that as it may, the chief deity, identified with Platonic Good, remained with Julian schematically 'somehow prior' to the rest. The chief deity was variously identified in terms of the Graeco-Roman divinities Helios or Helios-Mithras, with some of his remit delegated to subaltern divinities, with whom were sometimes associated astral beings that seem to have had some considerable influence on Mithraic devotions.²¹¹ The God of Abraham, to whom he paid respect, was uncertainly identified as Helios, as Attis the immediate creator of the sublunary world, or simply as the particular tutelary deity of the Israelites.²¹² Such variety of identification and nomenclature needs to be interpreted with reference to the polyonymous, cult-related possibilities of polytheism when conjoined with sacramental philosophy.

It was thus that, with Philonic input, the conceptual bases of a subordinationist theology were laid down for later Muslim and Christian, in a word for late antique and medieval, philosophy:²¹³ a subordinationist theology of hierarchy with its associated polyonymy and hypostases, with oracularism and inspiration, but as yet without a canonical scripture, unless one were to regard the Chaldaean Oracles as having had a scriptural status; what it does have is a notion of revelation, which is by no means alien to Greek philosophy.²¹⁴ But this theology was not confined to Neo-Platonists, nor to sacramental philosophers like Julian, with his pagan priesthood attired in white, nor to vegetarians like Plotinus or neo-Pythagoreans. It was not confined to ascetic late antique philosophers, given to 'ferocious self-grooming',²¹⁵ who connected philosophical knowledge to the desiderata of personal and sectarian ritual and vatic pronouncement characteristic of mystery cults. It also attracted representatives of a wide

²¹⁰ Stroumsa, *Sacrifice*, 41 ff., 150 ff.; Bowersock, *Hellenism*, 21 f.; *Julian*, 73 ff., 83 f.; Bouffartigue, 'Julien', 252 ff.; Dvornik, *Political Philosophy*, 75 ff.

²¹¹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 334–5 n 2. ²¹² *Julian, Works*, 1.361, 387; 3.355 ff.

²¹³ Cf. Wolfson, *Philo*, 2.445 ff. ²¹⁴ Hadot, 'Exégèse', 23, 29 f.

²¹⁵ Brown, *Christendom*, 29. For the earlier, classical history of some aspects of this ascetic and aesthetic of self-cultivation, see Foucault, *Herméneutique*, 3 ff. and *passim*; for late antique developments, Stroumsa, *Sacrifice*, ch. 1, *passim*.

variety of intellectual trends.²¹⁶ In all, philosophers were the alter ego of the educated elite, and their *paideia* and ferocious self-grooming and deportment provided exemplary qualities which preserved the cohesion of the elite, added cultural weight to social distance, and facilitated the expansion and recruitment into the elite.²¹⁷

In all, this subordinationist theology had, even before Julian's time, found favour in the imperial court and its provincial extensions. In Julia Domna's (d. 217) entourage, for one,²¹⁸ it was not only the Second Sophistic that was cultivated. Philosophy in this setting took on the aspect of 'a combination of religious superstition with somewhat pretentious erudition',²¹⁹ and there existed then a widespread 'Platonic underground' with its philosophical koine, not entirely confined to educated pagan circles.²²⁰

Clearly, quite apart from the cultic aspect of Chaldaeo-Platonism, there was a broader imperial pagan elite who took to the basic conceptual elements of this 'sacramental philosophy', attracted in part to its elitist spirit. But it spread farther afield, in such a way that courtly as distinct from demotic polytheism was transformed into a religion different from that which had prevailed in the time of Augustus. This had become a religion in which many of the gods and heroes of ancient myth retained a largely literary existence, often derided in the theatre,²²¹ and was one in which Platonism was not confined to the cultivation of philosophy in the manner well described by Plutarch: 'it is not the cultivation of a beard . . . and the wearing of a threadbare cloak that make a philosopher'.²²²

Although it might well be correct to state that later Platonism was not theistic in the religious sense, and that, for many Platonists of Late Antiquity, the loftier the conception the lower the propensity to worship,²²³ it must yet be admitted that philosophy became more than a refinement of the cultivated individual and a token of social and courtly, urbane distinction: one expressed, for instance, in the famous Cassiopeia mosaic at Palmyra, with an iconography depicting Neo-Platonic theories of the

²¹⁶ Cumont, 'Jupiter', 329 ff.

²¹⁷ Brown, 'Late antiquity and Islam', 25, 28. The example of the pagan Themistius, serving both Julian and Christian emperors, stands out: Heather, 'Themistius', 136 ff.

²¹⁸ In Antioch and elsewhere, she patronised Papinian, Ulpian, Diogenes Laertius, Dio Cassius and Philostratus; she supported the foundation of a Neo-Platonic school at Apamea under Amelius, disciple of Numenius and Plotinus' secretary and the editor of his work: Teixidor, 'Antiquités', 716.

²¹⁹ Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 168. ²²⁰ Athanassiadi and Frede, 'Introduction', 11 ff., 17.

²²¹ Athanassiadi and Frede, 'Introduction', 3; Cumont, *Oriental Cults*, 202 ff.; Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles*, 313 f., 399.

²²² Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, § 3; Fowden, *Hermes*, 186 ff., 202 f.

²²³ Edwards, 'Pagan and Christian monotheism', 217 f., 223.

soul.²²⁴ It also acquired, with what is emblematically known as Chaldaicism, a vatic vocation, in which elementary ideas implicit in pagan idolatry were reclaimed by the higher philosophical calling which had hitherto held itself aloof from them.²²⁵ The end of the second century seems to have marked a watershed, a late antique Hellenistic fermentation pointing to new beginnings and to a definable trend. This trend was to be continued in parallel with the monotheising and cosmopolitan development which was Christianity, and coeval with it, and was to draw definitive consequences under Islam.²²⁶

There can be little doubt that it was only under conditions of cosmopolitan empire that this cosmocratic scheme tended towards the allocation of primacy by a particular deity. The pantheocratic and pantocratic model was crafted in a manner that mirrored imperial polity, and indeed with the two, the mundane and the extra-mundane, acting as doubles, metaphors and allegories of one another. These mutual associations were legion in Hellenistic, Byzantine and Muslim political thought. Transcendence was the leitmotif of this subordinationist theology. Of Roman sovereigns, the Severans were 'a little ahead of their times' in their awareness of it, as in their awareness of its worldly imperial double.²²⁷

Neo-Platonism formulated this subordinationist theology in a number of ways and with a variety of inflexions whose discussion here will be superfluous. What needs to be noted are two matters. The first is that, quite apart from differences and distinctive positions within Neo-Platonism, it can be seen to rest on an invariant structural principle, that of linear hierarchy.²²⁸ This implies strongly a tendency to affirm the transcendence, in varying measures of remoteness and aloofness, and *sui generis* distinctiveness and superiority of the first, supreme deity, indivisibly authoritative. He was termed, among other names, *basileus* and *pater*, Theos and Allāh.

The second point is the sacramentalist aspect that was to be crucial for Christianity. It was the principle of a transcendent instance, and a variety of possible metaphysics allied to it, that came to constitute the terms in which early Christological discussions took place; it was disputes over the relationship of this metaphysics to monotheistic doctrine that were to give rise to Arianism and other notions of Christology. This was to be attenuated and rendered less rigorous in the Nicene formula of *homoousia*,

²²⁴ Balty, 'Version orientale'; Stern, *Mosaïques*; Bowersock, *Mosaics*, 33 ff.

²²⁵ Cf. Geffcken, 'Bilderstreit', 304 ff. ²²⁶ Athanassiadi and Frede, 'Introduction', 1, 3.

²²⁷ Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 51.

²²⁸ See the detailed discussion of this metaphysical hierarchy in a different – but continuous – historical setting, in al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought*, 2 ff.

consubstantiality, an unexpected term of theologico-diplomatic compromise.²²⁹ The Nicene diophysite formula allied a monotheistic doctrine to a diolatrous cult which was at the heart of Christian worship, imposing upon metaphysics a sacramental imperative, ultimately a religio-anthropological imperative, which was doctrinally to harden as a result of Christological disputes following Nicaea and, in Latin Christianity, to give way to a fully fledged diotheistic creed, the *filioque*, first introduced at the Council of Toledo in 589.

Pagan metaphysics was not, in its turn and in its more socially and politically consequent forms, bereft of cultic and magical and mythological infrastructure – in short, of Theurgy broadly defined.²³⁰ The trend towards henotheism in which deities, especially Oriental deities, were in many ways aspects, functions and representatives of the one supreme being²³¹ was enmeshed with cultic practices based on the polyonymous translations and associations that have already been encountered. Under œcumenical conditions, the incorporation of local deities within the Graeco-Roman pantheon made fuller and richer the honour and worship offered to the supreme God.²³²

Iconographic polytheism was practically assembled into what resembled cultic monolatry in the age of Julian.²³³ In this, he perhaps followed a trend to set up an imperial priesthood by the emperor Maximinius (r. 235–238) a generation earlier, not just a priesthood serving the emperor-cult, but an ecclesiastical hierarchy.²³⁴ This was an arrangement which was itself conditioned by an articulated notion of a unified state religion betokened by the imperial edict of 247 requiring citizens to sacrifice to the emperor, and introducing certain elements of control over this. Observance of *religio romana*, the term then used for the first time, became an individual responsibility, not just a communal event,²³⁵ thereby constituting religion as a discrete and differentiated category of social life at a time when Christianity was being crystallised, and when Judaism was also being constituted in similar terms.²³⁶ Julian's proposed pagan church, animated by a spirit of intolerance 'more Christian than pagan',²³⁷ was to constitute a specialised and privileged corps, given to a regime of abstinence and ritual

²²⁹ There has recently been some detailed substantive scholarship, historical, theological and philosophical, inattentive to the traditional aversion for Arius: Stead, *Divine Substance*; Luibhéid, *Council*; Williams, *Arius*; Hanson, *Doctrine*.

²³⁰ See especially, Fowden, *Hermes*, 134 and *passim*, and Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles*, 78 ff., 96 ff., 101, 137.

²³¹ Bigg, *Platonists*, 282 f., 282 n. ²³² Cf. Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 28 f.

²³³ Fowden, *Empire*, p. 53. ²³⁴ Barnes, *Constantine*, 159.

²³⁵ Mitchell, *Later Roman Empire*, 240. ²³⁶ Schwarz, *Imperialism*, 179, and elaborations at 192 ff.

²³⁷ Bowersock, *Julian*, 85 ff.; Koch, 'Empereur Julien', 512.

purity – Julian had considered it necessary that he ritually cleanse himself of the impurities imparted by his baptism, and his having been defiled by the Eucharistic Host.²³⁸ What was sought was organisation and discipline in matters religious, including those concerning theatre, regimes of abstinence and philanthropy associated with the Galileans.²³⁹ Such was an elite response to the sort of scepticism that caused Apuleius' description of a priest of Cybele, who 'acted the part of a raving lunatic – as though the presence of gods did not raise man above himself but depressed him into disease and disorder'.²⁴⁰

From pantheon to pantheos

Late antique paganism was generally maintained at the two opposite ends of the social scale, by the senatorial and municipal aristocracy and by the peasantry, although Constantine had promoted the emergence of a new upper class which does not appear to have been divided along religious lines.²⁴¹ However, it must be said that pagans seem generally to have failed to comprehend the conflict of religions in political terms.²⁴² And it was at the social points of resistance to Christianity that Justinian focused his efforts: the closure of temples targeted the countryside, and banning teaching by pagan *grammatikoi* targeted urban resistance to Christianity – determined acts, but not altogether decisive in their consequence.²⁴³ All the while, nascent Christianity and Oriental cults had a shared vocabulary (*doulos*, *mysterion*, *symbolon*, *pantocrator*, among others).²⁴⁴

Yet the movement from polytheism to monotheism, whatever the exact definition and the rigour of the latter, presented few conceptual problems.²⁴⁵ Matters are at once more complex in detail than is usually assumed, and simpler in conceptual terms. In theological terms, it is clear that polytheism is a polemical notion arising from monotheistic self-definition, and not really crucial to definitions and notions of divinity,

²³⁸ Koch, 'Empereur Julien', 73 f., 530 ff.

²³⁹ Julian, *Works*, 2.297 ff., 303 ff, 377; 3.57, 71 f., 335. ²⁴⁰ Apuleius, *Golden Ass*, 182 and 178 ff.

²⁴¹ Perhaps the best brief general account of the persistence of polytheism is given by Haldon, *Byzantium*, 327 ff. See also Mango, *Byzantium*, 89; Jones, 'Greeks', 21 ff., 26 ff.; Brown, *Christendom*, 44 f.; Harl, 'Sacrifice', 15.

²⁴² Harl, 'Sacrifice', 14. ²⁴³ Especially, Cameron, 'Last days', 11 ff., 22 ff.; Harl, 'Sacrifice', 25, 27.

²⁴⁴ Belayche, 'Christianisme', 29.

²⁴⁵ Polytheism as a term seems to have been first coined by Philo as a polemical category, and the notion was to have a long and variegated history from Deism in the seventeenth century, through the Enlightenment, German Romanticism and historicism, on to evolutionism and British and French anthropology, and the comparative history of religion, very well sketched by Gladigow, 'Strukturprobleme', 292 f., and Schmidt, 'Polytheisms', 13 and *passim*.

of its attributes, its nature and its functions.²⁴⁶ What changed when such a transition was authoritatively declared was the conceptual and mythical economy of the divine world, its demography, as it were, with a new classification of invisible beings, but not the common character of such beings. The crucial element in this movement was the institution of a deity with exclusive rights to cult – first Yahweh with His many names, including one too hallowed to be articulated, then God the Son, and later Allāh with His many Names.

Central to what has been called *die mosaische Unterscheidung* is clearly a distinction not only between the one and the many, but between true and false religion, a distinction which denied divine status to deities other than the One, without necessarily denying their existence. This ‘theo-clasm’, the reconfiguration of the divine realm in terms of subordination and superordination, is clearly an act whose sense at the moment of inception was primarily political,²⁴⁷ involving decisions made in the context of the socio-political setting of votaries. Depending on the level of social differentiation and development, such a political act could, and usually did, acquire theological and mythological expressions. It allocated cultic loyalty to only one among many; the others were relegated, as suggested, to demonic or angelic status, and to demons is commonly – but not invariably – attributed the evil that befalls mankind.²⁴⁸ There were polytheistic parallels to the downgrading of some subordinate divinities to demonic status.²⁴⁹

Once the one deity had acquired primacy, he or she became less amenable to manipulation, or ‘coercion’ in Weber’s terms. It might be well to refer to deities chained to prevent them from defecting to a besieging enemy, as in Babylon or in Tyre as they were besieged by Alexander.²⁵⁰ The exclusive deity becomes exigent in a variety of ways, including the inspiration of regulative scriptures of cultic, social and political purchase. We have seen that the ground had been prepared conceptually for this by the notion of a supreme god, and Eusebius, for one, had used a language comprehensible

²⁴⁶ Ahn, “‘Monotheismus’ – ‘Polytheismus,’” 5 ff., 16, 20.

²⁴⁷ Assmann, *Unterscheidung*, 12 f., 37 ff., 58 – views preceded by d’Holbach, on which see Schmidt, ‘Polytheisms’, 24.

²⁴⁸ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 3.37, 8.31; St Augustine, *City of God*, 6, ‘Preface’; 9.19, 23; Brown, *World*, pp. 154 ff. For basic philosophical elaborations, Bigg, *Platonists*, 37 ff.

²⁴⁹ For instance, Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, § 155.

²⁵⁰ Isaiah, 40.19; Bevan, *Holy Images*, 28; Ellen, ‘Fetishism’, 28; ‘Images and idols’, in *ERE*. The possible defection of divinities was systematically cultivated by the Romans through the ritual of *evocatio*, in which Roman commanders would press their advantage in war by offering the patron deity of the enemy a better temple and better worship in Rome if they were to defect: Beard *et al.*, *Religions*, 34 f., 82 f., 133 f.

to both pagans and Christians to express this idea in terms of a theology in which monotheism and polytheism were not mutually exclusive.²⁵¹ We have also seen that the emperor Julian adopted what came close to resembling a cultic monolatry, all the while preserving polytheist iconography,²⁵² and we might add that Porphyry, at one point in his life, saw no difficulty in integrating Jesus into his scheme of oracles, as he optimistically attempted to integrate Christianity into the prevailing Hellenistic culture.²⁵³

All told, the tendential orientation of this movement, incorporating phases of translation and syncretism, moments of mutual identification and ultimately assimilation, is grounded in a structural element overgrown with a variety of possible expressions and representations for divinity. This was an elementary structure involved in the definition of the sacred, based on abstract polarity and hierarchy, variously expressed in theological and mythological terms, with the latter, the mythological, having a theological redaction, as we shall see further below.²⁵⁴ This tendential orientation is one in which political hierarchy, broadly defined as a structure of mundane subordination and superordination, is homologous with a hierarchy of the divine and an analogical transposition of this hierarchy as it describes the connection between God and man.²⁵⁵ In the spaces between, cult performs its magical tasks, by supplication and conjuration.

What can also be said is that the pagan theology which has been described briefly, having paved the way to Christianity and given it a subordinationist metaphysical vocabulary and a bundle of concepts, became a pale image of the new religion when regarded from the perspective of the consistent nominative and mythological exclusivism of the monotheistic divinity.²⁵⁶ It has been argued with some justification that the pagan Celsus seems more strictly monotheistic than Origen,²⁵⁷ no matter how defensive his subordinationism may have been.²⁵⁸ But time proved to be on the side of Christian subordinationism, shorn cultically of the more abstract notions of divine transcendence, having in the course of the third and fourth centuries, the period that saw the end of ancient Christianity, completed its

²⁵¹ 'Introduction' to Drake, *Praise*, 54 f., 56; Chadwick, 'Introduction' to Origen, *Contra Celsum*, xviii; Peterson, *Monotheismus*, 44 ff.

²⁵² Fowden, *Empire*, 53. ²⁵³ Barnes, *Constantine*, 175 ff.

²⁵⁴ Cf. Wach, *Sociology*, 20. For a telling case for the expression of myth in terms of doctrine, and even in the conception of a legal order, see al-Azmeh, *Times*, ch. 3.

²⁵⁵ Among others: Hocart, *Kingship*, 7, who adds that, 'in the present state of our knowledge', it is not possible to assert that the worship of gods preceded that of kings; Cailliois, *Homme*, 117, 123; Meletinski, *Poetics*, 210.

²⁵⁶ Cf. Simon, 'Christianisme'. ²⁵⁷ Stroumsa, *Sacrifice*, 28 f.

²⁵⁸ Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, pp. 28 f.

self-definition against polytheism by deploying the notion of superstition and by Euhemeristic redactions of polytheist gods,²⁵⁹ and construction of a canon,²⁶⁰ endowing itself with a sacrificial priesthood,²⁶¹ ultimately a hierocracy, and developing a theology that gave credal and institutional force at once to cult and to myth.

There is little significant difference in the structure of transcendent supra-celestial divinity as described by Iamblichus and as described by Origen, Eusebius and Arius. All three Christians mentioned were of a more consistently monotheistic position than that expressed in the Creeds of Nicaea and Chalcedon. Indeed, Eusebius' and Origen's strong subordinationism was stricter than what was later to become standard dogma, adopting Numenius' distinction between the first god and the demiurge, in line with the increasing relegation of activity to the second principle by Middle Platonists.²⁶² Characteristic of this view was the complaint of Celsus against Christianity, which he maintained, by denying multiple divinities, in fact denied what properly belonged to the supreme god who, like a great Persian king, acted through his satraps.²⁶³

Christological controversies, whose details cannot be discussed here, seem for the purposes of our present concerns to revolve around the distinction between the axiological and the ontological senses of the subordinationist theology of Neo-Platonism.²⁶⁴ But it must be stated that the divinisation of Christ, or reference to him as *theos*, rarely if ever occurs in the New Testament, especially in its chronologically earlier parts. Yet the question of ontological parity between Father and Son needed to be faced, finally to be resolved, however messily, in the Nicene Creed.²⁶⁵ That the Son and Logos be ingenerate, *agennetos*, was taken by the predominant, Nicene outcome of the controversy to mean that the axiological and consequently the cultic and devotional moment in Christianity should be given the strong ontological sense of consubstantiation (*homoousia*) – which was, as suggested, a clear instance of the transposition of the cultic and the mythical to the metaphysical.

It seems overall that Christian dogma ejected the subordinationist Platonism of Origen and his age,²⁶⁶ 'extinguished a long tradition of

²⁵⁹ See the excellent discussion of Schott, 'Heresiology', 549, 554, 559.

²⁶⁰ Theissen, *Primitive Christian Religion*, ch. 12 *passim*; Markus, *End*, a book which is largely restricted, however, to developments in the West.

²⁶¹ On relevant sacrificial elements in the Eucharist and crucifixion, see Theissen, *Primitive Christian Religion*, 132 ff., 156 ff.

²⁶² See especially Lyman, *Christology*, 14 ff., 107 ff. ²⁶³ Celsus, *True Doctrine*, 116 f.

²⁶⁴ Cf. the perceptive discussion of Luibhéid, *Council*, 60 ff.

²⁶⁵ Harris, *Jesus the God*, *passim*. ²⁶⁶ Cf. Barnes, *Constantine*, 86 ff.

theological thought',²⁶⁷ and reaffirmed what was in effect a tritheistic creed which previous generations of Christian thinkers were trying to avoid.²⁶⁸ Tritheism implies the differentiation of divinity into the three capacities of sublime being, action and energy, of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This harks back to pagan philosophies and to more elementary manners of conceiving divinity in terms of elementary functions.²⁶⁹ It may be remembered that the *logos* has a long history of personification.²⁷⁰ Yet this vestigial polytheism was calibrated with use of the term Trinity, in such a way that dogma became a specific textual form of expressing a mythologeme.²⁷¹

In accommodating scriptural statements concerning divine creation *ex nihilo*, the Son was related to the Father in the metaphorical terms of procreation, origination and radiance; perhaps the most eloquent metaphor was the at once mimetic and magically consubstantial term *eikon*.²⁷² Many of the concepts involved in this elaboration of Christ, and some of the terminology used, was later to be reclaimed by Muslim theology in its doctrine of the co-eternity and the Qur'an as the ingenerate word of God. There was, to be sure, a 'metaphor inflation' in references to Christ in the Patristic and later ages, on such a scale that, as in late antique paganism, these were stretched to the very limits of sense – metaphors, added serially in litanies, multiplying the kratophanic capacities monopolised by the Christian divinity,²⁷³ and of a type with the epithets and epicleses discussed above.

The vocabularies by which transition was made between pagan and Christian theology were thus common to both. The break that Christian dogma operated consisted of giving primacy to the devotional and cultic moment in its conception of the Son as the immediate object of worship, and of attenuating the rigours of Neo-Platonist theology according to the requirement that Christ, the object of cult, be given a theological expression. And this object of cult was described by such terms as *kyrios*, *basileus*, *theos* and *pantocrator* which had been used cultically and as epicleses both for emperors and for pagan divinities.²⁷⁴

The terms used for the elevation of Christ, the object of cult, provoked controversy later, in the age of Byzantine iconoclasm: while Christ was consubstantial with the Father and constituted as such an object of worship,

²⁶⁷ Hanson, *Doctrine*, 730. ²⁶⁸ See Stead, *Divine Substance*, pp. 257 f.

²⁶⁹ Phenomenologically in terms of majesty, energy, mystery and terror, as 'mysterium tremendum fascinans et augustum': Otto, *Heilige*, ch. 4.

²⁷⁰ See 'Logos', *DDD*, 525 ff. ²⁷¹ Usener, 'Dreiheit', 35 ff.

²⁷² Cf. Lyman, *Christology*, 107 ff. ²⁷³ Wallraff, 'Viele Metaphern', 156, 158, 160.

²⁷⁴ Beskow, *Rex Gloriam*, 24 ff., 277 ff.

an icon of the Son could not be consubstantial with Him.²⁷⁵ This thought, countered to the views of iconodules, was one that Julian, among other pagans, held of idols, commending their use as vehicles for acts of worship that would thereby be transmitted to the proper and ultimate object of worship.²⁷⁶ Yet in a reversal of late antique pagan philosophical readiness to countenance the persistence of myth provided it were interpreted as a parable,²⁷⁷ iconoclasts affirmed a severe transcendence for God, in keeping with late antique theology, reversed in iconodule writings and indeed by Chalcedonian Trinitarianism.

Finally, in spite of the proliferation of names, titles, epithets and metaphors, worship was offered to only one deity, one who was in certain ways divisible into hypostases, in line with the divisibility of the sublime addressed above. This conception, with its various shades of conceptual possibility and redaction, was one crucial purpose of early Christian theology.²⁷⁸ One may well wonder how the two tendencies, the Christian one for proliferating names and metaphors and the late antique pagan tendency to reduce multiplicities to unity, are related: might early Christianity be regarded as a reaction or concession to paganism, or paganism be regarded as having been under the influence of Christian developments? There can clearly be no definitive answer to this; yet it is productive of a heuristic position²⁷⁹ that will be taken up in relation to the history of Allāh.

Empire sublimated

In AD 362, the emperor Julian informed the Alexandrians that the gods, and above all Serapis, had judged that he should rule over the world.²⁸⁰ This should not be taken as an entirely extraordinary or especially exorbitant claim, although Julian's belief in his own personal pre-existence²⁸¹ seems to have been peculiar, albeit not removed from a variety of beliefs in the soul, in metempsychosis, and from voices, apparitions and doubles that were legion in the antique and late antique worlds.²⁸²

²⁷⁵ Grabar, *Iconoclasm*, 93 ff., 646. ²⁷⁶ Julian, *Works*, 2.311 ff.

²⁷⁷ For instance, Hoffmann, *Porphyry*, 161.

²⁷⁸ Chadwick, 'Introduction' to Origen, *Contra Celsum*, xvii ff.

²⁷⁹ Wallraff, 'Viele Metaphern', p. 165. ²⁸⁰ Julian, *Works*, 3.63.

²⁸¹ Malley, *Hellenism and Christianity*, 203 ff.

²⁸² Hesiod, *Theogony*, 33 ff.: Zeus 'breathed a sacred voice in my mouth/With which to celebrate things to come/And things which were before'. Inspired philosophy, it has been maintained, can also be attributed to Parmenides, on evidence of the poetic form he chose (Hadot, 'Exégèse', 23). For some orientation to elementary forms: Saïd, 'ΕΙΔΟΛΟΝ', 11 ff.

Quite apart from subordinationist theology, the Roman empire in Late Antiquity followed earlier Roman precedents, including the habit in republican Rome of regarding the sovereign as *eikon theou*.²⁸³ Ancient as well as first-century Pythagoreans had formulated a political theology of theomimetic kingship which had purchase in late Rome. Ecphantus had coined the term *theomimesis* and, in line with the much earlier Diotogenes, construed royalty formally after the image of divinity. The deity was connected to the world as a king to his state, over and above the ethical and political notions of kingship in broad circulation.²⁸⁴ It seems that it was from the reign of Marcus Aurelius that royal authority as such was sacralised in these terms.²⁸⁵

This is an issue which needs to be considered quite apart from the deification of individual Roman emperors and members of their families. The story of Julius Caesar's self-deification, and the setting up of an empire-wide cult in his own honour, has been told in detail.²⁸⁶ Building upon Alexandrian, Ptolemaic and Seleucid precedents, and reclaiming the descent of the Iulii from Mars and Romulus, he was dubbed *deus invictus*, was identified with Jupiter and, among other names and places, was declared *theos epiphanes* in Ephesus.²⁸⁷ Augustus was likewise deified,²⁸⁸ and from his death in AD 14 to 337, when the first Christian emperor, Constantine, was buried, thirty-six out of sixty emperors and twenty-seven members of their families were apotheosised and received the title *divus*.²⁸⁹ Needless to say, this provoked among sections of the elite a long-lasting current of sarcastic comment exemplified by the *Ludus de morte divi Claudii*, the Younger Seneca's (d. 65) skit against the doddering Claudius wishing to become a god, a text better known as the *Apocolocyntosis* ('pumpkinification').

By the end of the first century AD, a refusal by the Senate to deify the emperor became almost impossible,²⁹⁰ and during the reign of Diocletian, *proskynesis*, prostration before the emperor, was introduced, as was the ceremonial of kissing the imperial purple.²⁹¹ Although the 'ideology of the Tetrarchy' implied no official deification of Diocletian or of his co-emperor Maximian, placed merely under the protection of Jupiter and Hercules,

²⁸³ Chesnut, *Christian Historians*, 144 and 134 ff., 141 ff.

²⁸⁴ Texts in Delatte, *Traité*s, 92, 265, 272.

²⁸⁵ Fehrenbach, 'Reich', in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 5.426.

²⁸⁶ Weinstock, *Divus Julius*, *passim*, esp. chs. 17 and 18.

²⁸⁷ Weinstock, *Divus Julius*, 4, 186 ff., 303 ff., 296 f.; Beard *et al.*, *Religions*, 140 ff., who (149) note the mélange of fraud and piety, tradition and contrivance, political advantage and religious impulse involved.

²⁸⁸ Dvornik, *Political Philosophy*, 209 ff., 490 ff. ²⁸⁹ Price, *Rituals*, 57.

²⁹⁰ Price, *Rituals*, 92 and 71 ff. ²⁹¹ Price, *Rituals*, p. 98.

nevertheless panegyrics and iconography might render this official position ambivalent²⁹² in a manner that also marked political theology of the Byzantine Basileus, and was to mark the Caliph as well. And indeed, though treating the emperor as a deity was difficult, and led to a number of evasive arrangements²⁹³ or to deliberate ambiguity, the iconographic depiction of emperors was replete with cosmic associations that had been familiar in the depictions of divinities.²⁹⁴ From the time of Diocletian, emperors sent out their portraits to the provinces to receive homage, prefiguring the practice of the Byzantine Basileus of sending out the icon of his person.²⁹⁵ The idea that the image was a seat of the noumen, of a spirit animating a statue, led to the notion that the image possessed the same force and conveyed the same effect as the divine model animating it with sublime energy.²⁹⁶

Thus emerged the modern notion that Galerius, Diocletian and Constantine instituted something like a Caliphate.²⁹⁷ Much has been said already about the Oriental context out of which Roman ideas of *theomimesis* – and of the emperor as ceremonially and pictorially the ritual figure of *theomimesis*, for Christian emperors of *christomimesis* – emerged in Hellenistic and late antique times, along with historical references to Chaldaeanism and to Oriental sages in late Neo-Platonism and other philosophical currents that thrived under the late Roman empire. Oriental cults indeed had the advantage of enjoying the prestige of ‘an almost infinite antiquity’.²⁹⁸ With a special, astral twist, the Cappadocian Pythagorean and thaumaturgue Apollonius of Tyana (d. c. 120), much in favour in the court of Julia Domna and much later known to the Arabs as Bālīnūs of the Talisman (*ṣāhib al-ṭīlaṣm*), asserted that the truths of the Magi, the Chaldaeans, the Arabs and the Egyptians accrued precisely from their antiquity, with the additional advantage of being Oriental, therefore closer to the sun as it rises.²⁹⁹ Such Barbarian prestige, or indeed Philobarbarianism, associated with a notion of perennial philosophy,³⁰⁰ and with a synoptic historicism, could only have been rendered widely credible under conditions of cosmopolitan empire. In secular terms corresponding to salvation-historical terms which will be examined later, the conjunction of Romanity and universality was expressed in the second half of the fourth century by

²⁹² Barnes, *Constantine*, 11 f. ²⁹³ Price, *Rituals*, 215 f. ²⁹⁴ L’Orange, *Studies*, 28 ff.

²⁹⁵ Belting, *Likeness*, 106; Grabar, *Empereur*, 5 f. ²⁹⁶ Cf. Belting, *Likeness*, 37.

²⁹⁷ Cumont, *Oriental Religions*, 141; Spengler, *Decline*, 1.72, 405. On these developments see al-Azmeh, *Kingship*, 17 ff.

²⁹⁸ Cumont, ‘Jupiter’, 327. ²⁹⁹ Puech, ‘Numénus’, 770.

³⁰⁰ See especially Hadot, ‘Exégèse’, 23.

Ammianus Marcellinus when he asserted that Virtue and Fortune, 'ordinarily at variance, formed a pact of eternal peace' reflected in the growth of Rome.³⁰¹

The eventual conjunction of Rome and Christianity as an ecumenical cosmopolitan order involved the substitution of personal rectitude for civic virtue, and instated a novel conception of truth attached to religion. While Varro had disengaged truth from religion, Christians were incapable of understanding the notion of a civic religion.³⁰² This conjunction was to be at the foundation of Christian late antique and medieval political theology and eschatology, and later that of the Muslims as well. The conjunction of empire and religion was rounded off by Christian conceptions of history which came to be current in the Byzantine empire, and envisaged an even more rigorous schema of the unity of time, ascribed by their authors to the Books of Daniel and Zachariah, but deriving from a variety of traditions and settings. This was one of a succession of empires – the Assyrian, the Persian, the Macedonian and the Roman – to be rounded off by the appearance of the Messiah, in preparation for which the unity of Church and Roman empire based in Constantinople was essential.³⁰³ All the while, oracular activity feeding this and other matters continued to emerge, and to be registered, as was the Arab conquest of Alexandria registered, by a local Jew.³⁰⁴ This was an entirely unsurprising fact in a world inhabited by oracles, prophecies, possessions, unseen forces, talismans and demons, among the latter of whom, according to the seventh-century Palestinian monk Anastasius, some came into alliance with the Saracens in the course of the early Arab conquests.³⁰⁵

Late antique universalism sought politico-cultural domination in the context of empire,³⁰⁶ and this universality was intimately connected to the imperial office that constituted its lynchpin.³⁰⁷ Yet this political theology

³⁰¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *History*, 37. ³⁰² Stroumsa, *Sacrifice*, 175, 179.

³⁰³ See in general, Alexander, *Apocalyptic Tradition; Oracle*; Bousset, *Antichrist*; Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, ch. 8; Suermann, *Reaktion*; Reinink, 'Ps.-Methodius'; McGinn, *Apocalypticism*, ch. 1; Hultgård, 'Persian apocalypticism'; 'Antichrist', *ERE*; Swain, 'Theory of the four monarchies'; Vasilev, 'Medieval ideas' (the only text to attempt a comparison with Islamic concepts); Podskalsky, *Reichseshatologie*. The extravagant claims made for the decisive pertinence of Jewish apocalypticism are at best unnecessary assumptions and need to be remedied by the thought that Jewish apocalypticism itself makes little sense without the Near Eastern environment in which it emerged, amidst myths and restorative apocalyptic expectations, particularly in Babylonia under Macedonian rule – see the cautionary remarks of Collins, 'From prophecy', 133 ff.; Hultgård, 'Persian apocalypticism', 63 ff., and Reinink, 'Ps.-Methodius', 175–6 n. 116.

³⁰⁴ *Sibylline Oracles*, 14.317 ff., in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*.

³⁰⁵ Flusin, 'Démons', 405.

³⁰⁶ Fowden, *Empire*, 7 and *passim*.

³⁰⁷ Peri, 'Universalità', 159 ff.

of kingship, with various emphases and in a variety of terms of almost universal purchase from Hellenistic times,³⁰⁸ was also very much alive, sometimes in highly accentuated iconographic forms, among the Sasanians.³⁰⁹ Earlier, Arsacid sovereigns were known as *theos theopator* (god, of divine descent), and were depicted on coins receiving the diadem from Tyche, and later conjoined sacred with royal ancestry derived from the Avesta.³¹⁰ As with Romans, the Sasanians, *mutatis mutandis*, made imperial claims, and asserted a very sublime status for the King of Kings.³¹¹ Both were, as we shall see, constitutive of the political theology of the late antique Caliphate and of medieval Muslim polities.

But the Caliphate was also in profound generic continuity with east Roman, Byzantine monarchism and imperialism, whose Christian oecumenism did not differ in the substance of its conception of rulership from that of late polytheistic Rome.³¹² It is not hard to show how the imperial cult persisted in Constantinople after the conversion of Constantine. Julian's Themistius (d. c. 390) did not, in his vision of the emperor's authority and of imperial unity, differ much from Constantine's Eusebius. Both shared an exalted vocabulary of the imperial office. For his part, John Chrysostom 'unblushingly' placed the emperor in the role of God himself in describing his relation to his subjects in the context of a cosmopolitan state.³¹³

Crucial to this conception of the emperor is an implicit analogy with God working both ways, full of ambivalences as this might often have been, at least in certain modes of expression, ambivalences which were generally overridden by iconographic depictions, panegyrics and court ceremonial.³¹⁴ Ultimately deriving from Alexandrian Christian Platonism as exemplified by Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215), Origen's teacher, and hard on the heels of Philo's theomimetic conception *avant la lettre*,³¹⁵ the notion of God as a Persian Great King, hidden in his private apartments, and displaying his visible power through his *logos*, had become standard fare to both Roman Christians and Roman pagans.³¹⁶ Eusebius, among others, developed a political theology for Constantine's monarchy in terms

³⁰⁸ McEwan, *Oriental Origin*, *passim*.

³⁰⁹ Herzfeld, *Iran*, 320 and *passim*. ³¹⁰ 'Sāsānids', *EI*, 9.71 f.

³¹¹ Wiesenhoefer, *Ancient Persia*, 165 ff.; Zaehner, *Dawn*, 298; Morony, *Iraq*, 29 ff.

³¹² For concordances and generic continuities, see al-Azmeh, *Times*, 267 ff.

³¹³ Cameron, *Christianity*, 124 f., 131 f., 137; Beskow, *Rex Gloriorum*, 188, 319.

³¹⁴ Treitinger, *Kaiser- und Reichsidee*, *passim*.

³¹⁵ It is well to recall that Philo's impact was felt by Christians, primarily Clement and Origen, rather than by Jews, and that he was indeed less Rabbinic than St Paul: Chadwick, 'Philo', 156 f. Dvornik, *Political Philosophy*, 558 ff., 600 ff., 563 ff.

³¹⁶ Beskow, *Rex Gloriorum*, 263 ff.

of analogies with the Holy Spirit, and indeed, in his Tricennial Orations, used the term *basileus* for both god and emperor.³¹⁷ The symmetry between emperor and Christ in relation to what they govern is very well expressed in Byzantine art.³¹⁸

Christian emperors of Constantinople were no longer regarded as living gods, and the application to the emperor of the epithet *kyrios* was sometimes controversial in the Patristic age.³¹⁹ Nonetheless, the iconography, ceremonial and rhetoric of their rule, no less than the circulation of their images around the empire (despite Constantine having banned such cult images in his attempt to target the hinge of polytheism),³²⁰ were redolent of unspoken divine association. These were doctrinally expressed in terms of a typological and figurative mimesis of Christ the divine Pantocrator, and their political philosophy was thoroughly Hellenistic, with the emperor figuring as the law animate, *nomos empsychos*,³²¹ alongside his divine or otherwise sublime associations. The typological and mimetic representation of the emperor in relation to Christ itself repeats for its own purposes the construal under Constantine, among others, of Christ according to the pagan image of divine monarchy – the nimbus, rayed or otherwise, had astral origins. Thus the solar motifs in the image of Christ the Pantocrator and Cosmocrator were of considerable incidence, importance and consequence.³²² And although it appears to be true that the iconography of Christ was not in itself borrowed from imperial motifs, yet it was borrowed from those associated with pagan deities, such as Jupiter's throne, Asclepius' kindliness and Apollo's beauty.³²³ The emperor's construal gathered in both the pagan imperial motifs, some of which, as has been indicated, were shared with deities, and those accruing from analogies with Christ.

Thus were combined in imperial context a doctrine of divine monopoly, and imperial absolutism subtended by mundane monopoly. Both strands derived their conceptual and plastic sustenance from late antique philosophical and visual cultures. This absolutism was conceived as universalist and œcumenical in which historical reference was made with growing exclusiveness to the proximate state tradition deriving from Constantine and, later, Justinian, one in which Hellenism, with the rapid demise of the Julianic project, became largely rhetorical.³²⁴

³¹⁷ Drake, *In Praise of Constantine*, 89 and *passim*. On Eusebius and Constantine: Barnes, *Constantine*, *passim*.

³¹⁸ Grabar, *Empereur*, 98 ff.

³¹⁹ Beskow, *Rex Glorise*, 179 and 173 ff.

³²⁰ Barnes, *Constantinus*, 211.

³²¹ Al-Azmeh, *Kingship*, 28 ff., 42 ff.

³²² Wallraff, *Christus*, 126 ff.

³²³ Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, *passim*; Barasch, 'Bild', 3 and *passim*.

³²⁴ Mango, 'Discontinuity', 53 ff.; Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 121 ff., 173 ff. – but see Harl, 'Sacrifice', 16.

The analogies that we have seen between Christian emperors and God the Son cannot be altogether surprising. The empire of Constantine and his successors did not witness an abrupt transition to Christian monotheism. The idea was available and increasingly central, transition was slow and extremely complex, and composite Christian and pagan themes continued for long.³²⁵ After Julian's death in 363, his troops had had a preference for the pagan Salutius as his successor, and only upon his refusal did the Christian Jovian (r. 363–364) assume the purple.³²⁶ Constantine's image itself was ambivalent in this respect, perhaps to all but Lactantius (d. c. 320) and other, hopeful Christian members of his entourage. Like his predecessors and successors, he was a superstitious emperor who might have been brought to Christianity 'by means of a primitive test of gods'.³²⁷ He built and endowed churches, particularly in Rome, with benefactions of such an order and on such a scale as to establish the worship of Christ on an imperial footing.

Yet he was revered as a god, *theos*, in his new capital city, where he founded two pagan temples. Later, between 364 and 392, the three Christian emperors and co-emperors Valens, Gratian and Valentinian II patronised the restoration of the temple of Isis at Ostia, and Theodosius II (r. 408–450) wrote of his own noumen, albeit being careful to distinguish it from that of the supreme noumen to whom alone adoration was due.³²⁸ At the moment of imperial acclamation, the standard formula 'Auguste Constantine, dei te nobis servent' only became 'Deus te nobis servent' under Theodosius.³²⁹ Indeed, the empire was still not entirely Christian, and Christian belief, tenuously monotheistic, was yet to be set dogmatically – Constantius II (r. 337–361) championed Arianism, Anastasius I (r. 491–518) favoured Monophysitism, and Heraclius (r. 610–641) Monotheletism; 'any of these' positions on the Trinity might have triumphed ultimately.³³⁰

The conception of divine monarchy and its mundane analogues was buttressed by a Christian theology of history that sustained the imperial state's œcumenical vocation. It envisaged the Byzantine empire according to a rigorous schema of the unity of time: a typological *Heilsgeschichte*,³³¹ as indicated above. In this, time was accented, its linearity dented, by instances of divine intervention, and by typological re-enactments: a time whose

³²⁵ Cameron, *Christianity*, 196 ff. ³²⁶ Bowersock, *Julian*, 118.

³²⁷ Drake, 'Introduction' to *In Praise of Constantine*, 48.

³²⁸ Barnes, *Constantine*, 46 f., 71; Turcan, *Cults*, 123; Cameron, *Mediterranean*, 12 f.; Bowersock, 'Polytheism and monotheism', 7.

³²⁹ Jones, 'Greeks', 24. ³³⁰ Mango, *Byzantium*, 89.

³³¹ See notably Cameron, 'Eusebius', 133 ff.; Kemp, *Estrangement*, ch. 1; McCormack, 'Christ and empire', 298 ff.

accents came to correspond to accents of chronology marked by a cultic calendar of religious feasts,³³² themselves reflected in courtly ceremonial.

The empire, in which, according to well-known views of Clement, Origen and Eusebius and a whole tradition that followed them, the conjunction of Augustus and the Incarnation was providential rather than adventitious, thus became integral to *praepartio evangelica*.³³³ Byzantine emperors became typological re-enactments of veterotestamental kings and prophets.³³⁴ This doctrine was embraced even by Syriac churchmen in northern Mesopotamia, who had no reason to be supportive of the emergent Byzantine Orthodoxy which had anathematised them.³³⁵ Byzantium was no longer an empire like any other, but, according to the decisively consequential synthesis of Eusebius, a providential concordance of a primeval religion³³⁶ and of the Augustan empire³³⁷ – a theme that crowns that of imperial translation discussed in [chapter 1](#) above.

This conjunction of political theology and a theology of history was to have decisive influence on the Caliphate. We shall see in subsequent chapters that as the history of Paleo-Islam moved into the history of Islam, one can discern the re-enactment of transitions that were discussed in the foregoing pages: from deities of the instant to a named exclusive deity, propelled by the energy of dominion of œcumenical ambition, officiated by Caliphs bearing a sacred office, and overlaid by a theological sublimation of cult.

³³² Dumézil, 'Temps et mythes', 237, 240, 243; Bloch, 'Past', *passim*; Sorokin and Merton, 'Social time', 622; al-Azmeh, 'Chronophagous discourse' in *Times*, 70 ff.

³³³ Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 50, 314 ff.; Eusebius, *History*, book 10, *passim*.

³³⁴ Dagron, *Empereur*, 21 ff., 118 f.; Jeffreys, 'Attitude', 202 ff.; al-Azmeh, *Kingship*, 41 ff.; Peterson, *Monotheismus*, pp. 57 ff., 81 ff. The theme of typological re-enactment, of type and figure in a relation of fulfilment, is of course of prime importance for inter-testamental exegesis, and for Muslim typologies as well. St Paul's division of time into a time before the Law, a time under the Law and a time of Grace (Romans 6.14) was 'at the heart' of his theology (Goppelt, *Typus*, 151), and was to be taken up by all major Patristic figures, including Augustine (*Enchiridion*, § 18) – see Bultmann, *Theologie*, 218 f.; Dempf, *Sacrum Imperium*, 77 ff. The history of humanity prior to Christianity is thus construed as a period of preparation, orchestrated by God according to natural proclivities of humanity (Benin, 'Cunning', 182 ff.). This scheme is also evident, in suitably modified form, in Midrashic and Talmudic literature (Benin, 'Cunning', 180 f.; Spiegel, 'Historical thought', 83). Funkenstein (*Heilsplan*, 15, 129 n. 27) cites Talmudic literature, the Book of Enoch and the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch in evidence for his contention that the view has an apocalyptic background.

³³⁵ Suermann, *Reaktion*, 193 ff.; Griffith, 'Ephraem', 48, 52.

³³⁶ See Schott, 'Heresiology', 560–2.

³³⁷ Al-Azmeh, *Kingship*, 44 f.; Barnes, *Constantine*, 126 f.; Eusebius, *History*, 1.4.11.

Arabia and Arab ethnogenesis in Late Antiquity

A narrowing of focus will allow us now to consider in some detail one overarching theme of this book, that of the late antique conditions for the emergence of Muḥammad's movement. We shall be dealing with Arabs,¹ and conditions for the genesis of Paleo-Islam, an Arab religion, and eventually of Islam, a religion of œcumenical vocation and ambition. This chapter starts by thematising the location of the Arabs in the late antique imperial system, and especially in relation to conditions at the fringes of empires, factors without which the history of the Arabs in Late Antiquity cannot be understood:² emphasis in scholarship is usually placed on Arab involvement with empire, but little is generally said about imperial involvement in shaping the political and social constitution of the Arabs themselves – including conditions that made for the use of Arabic as a literary and administrative language and the development of Arabic script, a development coeval with the rise of a whole range of languages and scripts across the empire, such as Gothic, Coptic, Palestinian Aramaic, Armenian and Georgian.³

¹ Anglo-Saxon and more specifically British scholarship seems generally to have a problem with employing the name 'Arabs', with reluctance, of varying intensity, to use the name at all, and with myriad caveats, inverted commas and evasive locutions even when such a nomination is manifestly apt. While it is advisable to eschew anachronism, primordialism and perennialism, the fact remains that the late antique Arabs, for all their multiple contemporary designations, came from the third century AD to leave a clear and distinct epigraphic record, and left literary traces in genealogies which, for all their legendary materials, retained a remarkable accuracy often confirming what was inscribed in stone, as in the genealogies of the Lakhm (Hoyland, 'Arab kings', 380, 389 f., and *passim*), in addition to language, alliance and territorial networks. This chapter is concerned with Arab ethnogenesis, and makes no primordialist assumptions. The fullest bibliography of sources and modern studies (including theses) for late antique Arabs is 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Maknaba*.

² Hoyland ('Arab kings', 374) expresses envy at the scholarship on Roman interaction with western Barbarians, which has shown how this led to the ethnogenesis of Franks and others, and their eventual transformation into conquerors. That the Arabs' relations with empire was an integral part of their history had already been underlined by Miquel, *Islam*, 35, and noted very long ago by Pliny (*Natural History*, 6.162).

³ This point was well made by Hoyland, 'Arab kings', 375.

This will entail a discussion of the degree to which and the way in which the Arabs, especially those of Arabia, and particularly the Ḥijāz,⁴ constituted a part of this system, and were subject to transformations as a consequence of its dynamics. Their history in the period preceding Muḥammad was subject to the vagaries of these shifting dynamics, both geo-political and religious. The pressures of the international imperial system upon Arab societies and polities in place will be considered, with the purpose of writing the Arabs into Late Antiquity, a period which saw considerable inter-imperial turbulence with determinate consequences for inner Arabia, leading to very frequent internal changes and realignments, political as well as religious.

The following discussion will also consider the relative isolation of the Ḥijāz within this system, despite impressions conveyed by the intensity of Meccan commerce, a rather late phenomenon, and the way in which this isolation constituted a stubbornly polytheistic and, to a certain extent, ethnographic reservation in which more archaic forms of polytheism persisted for long. The aim is to prepare the ground for discussion of the emergence of Paleo-Islam that will follow in later chapters.

Ultimately, this volatile pagan reservation, surrounded, at some distance, by empires and imperial religions, was convulsively squeezed out of the Peninsula, duly transformed along imperial models, under the twin impact of internal transformations brought about by Muḥammad, Allāh and their people, and external pressures and the opportunities provided by the fragility and exposure of areas north of the Peninsula resulting from the last Persian–Roman wars (602–628). A patchwork of shifting alliances, continually made and unmade, marked the history of this as well as previous periods, and reflected to a certain extent the unstable balances obtaining from a fragile human existence in a hard environment, with only the slightest of changes in climatic patterns having at times calamitous consequences.

Arab ethnogenetic development took place at more or less the same time as the Germanic, at the other periphery of the Roman empire; as the

⁴ This region is understood throughout in much the same way as defined by 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, being the region of western Arabia whose northern extremity is located at Taymā' (WAQ, 711), and whose main axis of communication led to southern Syria and to coastal Palestine at Gaza. This corresponded roughly with the Roman frontier and with the early Nabataean frontier (Sartre, *Etudes*, 30; Lammens, *Arabie*, 310 ff.). Its southern extremity is the region between al-Ṭā'if and Najrān, on which see Robin, 'Nağrān', 48 f. (53 ff. for its internal organisation), the latter being the obligatory point of passage between Yemen and central Arabia. The coastal region is normally called Tihāma (as is the Yemenite coastal region) and was not always considered an integral part of the region, on which see the invaluable description of 'Arrām b. al-Aṣḥagh, *Asmā'*. See also 'Tihāma', *EL*.

former were being brought into the ambit of Late Antiquity, the latter were receding from its purview.⁵ Arab polities, and the internal developments of Arab society, polity and culture, that arose in tandem with ethnogenetic development, were part of a broader and longer history that saw the effects of the late antique imperial system within the desert and the steppe.

Late Antiquity witnessed the progressive incorporation of the Fertile Crescent, hitherto Seleucid and in part independently Aramaean or otherwise, into the ambit of Romanity, frequently contested by the Parthians and, later, the Sasanians. This not only occurred in the fertile and urban heartlands of the region abutting the imperial *limes*, but also extended in different ways and measures to the depths of the Syrian desert and its natural geographical and ethnological extensions into the Arabian Peninsula. The situation was such that the area was not merely a desolate desert frontier region between Rome and Persia, but an increasingly articulated zone lending varying measures of cohesion and the incorporation to Arabs, pastoralists and otherwise.⁶ This extended elements of the normative political and religious orders of empire even to the remotest areas, in varying measures of depth and incidence, of permanence and evanescence. This was particularly the case in the Syrian desert and along a line connecting its southern and south-eastern reaches to the energetic polities of Yemen through the Najd plateau.

One major point being made in this chapter is that empires and other ambient polities had a determinate effect arising from the networks across the desert occasioned by war, trade and the extraction of natural resources. Peoples of the desert, and especially nomadic peoples but also the trans-humants who are central to this discussion, act as sailors and sailing peoples do on the sea. Thalassocracies are, in effect, like networks of nodes in the desert and the steppe of strategic or commercial relevance and a certain permanence largely prescribed by topography and geography, networks that bind, cumulatively with time, and aid the spread, homogenisation and consolidation of political, material-cultural, mythical, linguistic and other elements of ethnological commonality. In this, networks of nodes of commerce and war, themselves facilitating the intensification of flows, and giving 'strength to weak ties', may acquire explanatory rather than

⁵ Heather (*Empires*, 380), having described in considerable detail the effect of Rome on the internal constitution (and migration) of Germanic groups in Europe and the formation of Germanic polities between the first and fourth centuries, makes the point, alas all too briefly, of a certain parallelism between these and the formation of steadily growing Arab polities at the two fringes of empire between the fourth and sixth centuries. We shall see that the development of Arab populations under the effects of empire was earlier than Heather assumes.

⁶ Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 65 f.

simply descriptive value, as recently well demonstrated by the example of Magna Graecia.⁷ By analogy, the various routes that traverse Arabia might be seen like wadis that dry up for various periods, but which leave a seam through which communications will continue to flow and networks will be consolidated with time.

Al-‘Arab al-‘Āriba and al-‘Arab al-Musta‘riba⁸

There is clearly no need to relate here the history of Arab involvement with empire from Neo-Assyrian times, of Arab trading kingdoms in north-west Arabia such as Liḥyān,⁹ or of the various principalities established by families of arguably Arab stock along the arc of the Fertile Crescent and in its folds, in Edessa, Emesa, Palmyra, Chalcis, Hatra, Petra and elsewhere following Seleucid domination and before the Roman conquest. The story is well known in outline and, in many cases, in not inconsiderable detail.¹⁰ The important issue is the modalities and extents of political Romanisation. This will be followed by a discussion of the political reconfiguration of the region from the early third century, with the formation of Arab ‘buffer’ polities, or at least of dominions of relatively short duration, with a variable geometry extending into desert areas, in the context of the struggle between Ctesiphon and New Rome, and of the sponsorship by the Sabaeans and,

⁷ Malkin, *Greek World*, 27 and 10, 17, 21, 38, 209 and *passim*. I was unfortunately unable to make full use of this work, which appeared after this chapter was written.

⁸ The first term, meaning roughly ‘Arabising Arabs’, implying ‘the most Arab of Arabs’, or perhaps ‘primeval Arabs’, is generally applied in classical Arabic historical writing with reference to ancient and/or legendary Arabs, such as ‘Ād, Thamūd, Ṭasm and Jadīs, dwelling in an indefinite past and possibly representing figures of ancient aetiological myths (Rodinson, ‘Espace’, 19 f., 21 – see especially the account of Ju‘ayt, *al-Kūfa*, 184 ff.). These preceded those who were later to be placed in Arab genealogies, who came to speak what became Arabic, and who were known to outsiders as Saracens or Tayyāyē. The second term means ‘Arabised Arabs’. Both are used here somewhat schematically, and for chronological purposes, in part following the *locus classicus* of this periodisation of Arab history which is Ibn Khaldūn’s *Tārīkh*, used here in a version which excludes his genealogical interpretation: see the sketch of al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn*, 16 f. Robin (‘Inscriptions’, 543) is one scholar who has seen merit and cogency in this classical Arabic historiographical division, and interprets it in terms of the development of what was to become the Arabic koine among the more advanced groups, associated with the Yemenite expansion northwards, the whole matter based upon hypothetical extrapolation from the epigraphic distribution of the definite article *al-*. Hoyland too (*Arabia*, 233, 236) finds merit in this division of the Arabs, also in a certain connection with the distribution and use of the *al-*, with Tanūkh and Kinda, for instance, classified as ‘Arab ‘Āriba.

⁹ Al-Anṣārī, *al-Ḥaḍāra*, 86 ff., and 89, 90 f., on Liḥyānid royalist, administrative and military organisation. Impressive colossal statues of their kings have been excavated: *Routes d’Arabie*, nos. 106, 107, 111–15.

¹⁰ Rodinson, *Arabs*, 54 f.; Hoyland, *Arabia*, chs. 1–3; Retsö, *Arabs in Antiquity*, chs. 7, 9, 14; Sartre, *Etudes*, ch. 3, *passim*.

later, Ḥimyarite kingdoms of similar Arab allied or client polities.¹¹ This entailed the formation and nominal solidification of tribal groupings and confederations, under what became dynastic leadership, fairly rapidly and not always short-lived. It led to the crystallisation of tribal names under whose signature such groupings, whatever their composition, might be active and might stake claims to territorial mastery,¹² control not so much over territory, but over routes and resources. It should be emphasised that sovereignty and control are relational notions, and did not involve the drawing of stable and precise boundaries: control at the edges of domains, grand or slight, tended to blur, and depended on relations between groups, irrespective of size, that tended to look in all directions for security. Spatial configurations of territory reflected hierarchical relations of power, based on ever-changing tributary relations.

Associated with this ultimately ethnogenetic development is the use of the Greek terms *Sarakēnoi* and *Skēnatai* (tent dwellers)¹³ and the Syriac *Tayyāyē* for the Arabs, and the near-disappearance of the territorially vaguer word 'Arab' from Greek and Syriac works, a term that had been retained occasionally for archaising literary flourish.¹⁴ This change is associated with more precise reference by Greek and Syriac authors to people with whom they were coming into direct contact, now that the old client city-states on the fringes of empires and deserts were gone,¹⁵ and perhaps under administrative influence, with the use of the name Arab confined to inhabitants of the Roman province of Arabia.¹⁶ The name remained associated, however, with standard expressions of loathing for these 'wolves of the desert',¹⁷

¹¹ Very pertinently, Piotrovskii (*al-Yaman*, 123 ff.) spoke of the Ḥimyarisation of Arab genealogies during this period, in relation to the formation of confederations. For his part, Robin ('Langues', 124) spoke of Arabic (and Ḥimyarite) impact on the syntax and lexicon of epigraphic Sabaic, appearing between the fourth and sixth centuries to have become a dead language used for epigraphic purposes only.

¹² Hoyland, *Arabia*, 234 ff.; 'Arab kings', 384.

¹³ There have been many interpretations of the provenance of the term *Saracen*, which first appears in Ptolemy's *Geography* in the second century, reviewed critically by Macdonald ('Quelques réflexions', 93 f.), who argues convincingly (at 95) that the term should be seen to have been connected with the Ancient North Arabian root *s²-r-q*, with the word *sharq*, then as now, meaning 'east', verbal and nominal forms of which have been used to convey the idea of seasonal movement into the desert.

¹⁴ Retsö, *Arabs*, 521. ¹⁵ Hoyland, *Arabia*, 235. ¹⁶ Robin, 'Antiquité', 85.

¹⁷ Retsö, *Arabs*, 520 f., 585; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 235 f., 238 f.; Mayerson, 'Saracen', 283 ff.; Segal, 'Arabs', 89 ff.; Fisher, 'Ghassān', 313. One theme that emerges in late antique writings on the Arabs is their nakedness or otherwise savage and unkempt, barefooted appearance. Crone ('Barefoot and naked') teased out of literary and pictorial sources the rudimentary dress that they may have worn in Syria, south Arabia, central Arabia and the Hijāz, and contrasted the loin-cloths, bits and pieces acquired from neighbours or victims, other rudimentary vestments worn by desert Arabs, and their long hair (sometimes plaited), with the somewhat more elaborate clothing of their settled Arab neighbours. On Arabs in late antique and Hellenistic sources, Macdonald, 'Arabes en Syrie', 313 ff.

despite the other image of the Arab in Greek letters of the time, that of a merchant.¹⁸ Desert and steppe dwellers, like seamen, habitually have an ambivalent reputation, at once as conveyors and predators. The exception to this shift in nomenclature was in Yemen, where Ḥimyarite royal titlature from the middle of the fifth century stated that the king reigned over the Arabs of the High Country, presumably Najd.¹⁹

Finally, at more or less the same time, the name Maʿadd came to be used in Epigraphic South Arabian, in North Arabian epigraphy and in Arabic poetry, as well as in Syriac (Maʿaddāyē) and Greek (Maddenoi). A detailed recent study of this theme yields the conclusion that there is no evidence in this usage of reference to identifiable groups,²⁰ but that it referred rather to amorphous, far-ranging collectivities in central and west-central Arabia characterised by what was perceived as lawlessness and the lack of a proper political constitution, in all probability to camel-herding transhumants, 'high nomads'.²¹ This would indicate that, to the minds of the Arabs themselves, a distinction was being made between those among their number who entered into federations and systems of dominance and relations to empire, and those who remained outside this system, a distinction that was later to be taken up by Muḥammad himself, with clear antipathy to the Bedouin.

The Aramaicised and Hellenised groups of Arab stock ruling the principalities at the edges of the steppe are likely to have regarded themselves as quite distinct from the Arabs of the steppe, many of whom had been urged to settle and reclaim land.²² The late Roman empire saw some ethnic Arab upper-crust elements drawn from the steppe gradually incorporated into the higher ranks of imperial service, particularly under the Severans, and the territories they ruled were in a variety of ways incorporated into the late Roman colonial system.²³ Their cultures were highly Hellenised and Romanised, at least in their official expression, although Parthian influences on dress, iconography and, in the case of Palmyra, political titlature are evident. There is onomastic, religious and linguistic evidence of Arabic in a language such as that used in Palmyra,²⁴ a phenomenon noted elsewhere

¹⁸ Macdonald, 'Arabes en Syrie', 318. ¹⁹ Beaucamp *et al.*, 'Chrétiens de Naḡrān', 74.

²⁰ Indeed, prior to the composition of systematic genealogies, they were not designated as a genealogical group: Szombathy, *Genealogy*, 91.

²¹ Zwettler, 'Maʿadd', 254, 256, 284 f., and *passim*. ²² Pentz, *Invisible Conquest*, 17.

²³ Hoyland, *Arabia*, 82; Briquel-Chatonnet, 'Arabes', 42 f.; Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs*, 10 ff.; Chad, *Dynastes d'Émèse*, *passim*. Teixidor ('Antiquités', 717) stresses the statement that dynasts of Emesa regarded themselves as Aramaeans, not as Arabs, and that this distinction is also made in the sources, despite confusions to which Cicero, among others, was party.

²⁴ Gawlikowski, 'Arabes', who notes (at 108) that it cannot be excluded that some nomads spoke Aramaic.

as well.²⁵ From 269/70 Vhaballatus (Wahb Allāt), the master of Palmyra, 'Sparta among the cities of the Orient',²⁶ in a bid for imperial rank after the Palmyrenes had taken Syria, Egypt and much of Anatolia, had coins struck with the legend IMP[ERATOR] C[AESAR] VHABALLATUS AUG[USTUS]. Before the expansion of his ambitions and those of his mother Zenobia, who held effective control, coins struck by him in Antioch bore the legend RE[X] IM[PERATOR] D[UX] R[OMANUM]; thereafter, he had Zenobia declared Augusta and himself Augustus (on coins). His father Odenathus (Udhainat), having saved the eastern frontier for Rome after the Sasanians had captured the emperor Valerian at Edessa in 260, was declared *corrector totius orientis*; in a Palmyrene inscription, he had himself entitled additionally King of Kings, after the Sasanian fashion.²⁷

Palmyra was in many ways a spectacular exception, certainly in terms of ambition, but also in terms of prodigious wealth accruing from trade along the Euphrates and the Tigris, down to the Arabian Gulf and on to India, and in the existence of a wealthy commercial class of international connections.²⁸ This class left behind the elaborate funerary architecture still to be seen, and sponsored the building of the temples for which the city is famous. For the rest, the princes of these polities were normally termed *arabarchos* and *strategos*, locally known in Syriac as *māryā* or *shallīṭā*, the terms that designate local lords and chiefs, or Lords of the Arabs, *rb d'rb*.²⁹

At that time, and in earlier centuries, a number of tribal entities connected by Ancient North Arabian languages had made their appearance, without bequeathing elements of continuity that were built upon by later generations. Some were evanescent; others may have been of greater contemporary moment, but have left only traces inscribed upon rock. Whether Nabataea, al-Ṣafā or, for that matter, Dedan or Thamūd was Arab, and according to what definition,³⁰ seems to matter little in the perspective of the present discussion, quite apart from languages used.³¹ At all events,

²⁵ Briquel-Chatonnet, 'Arabes', 39 ff. ²⁶ Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs*, 38.

²⁷ Millar, *Roman Near East*, 172, 334; Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, 134; Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia*, 159 f. Earlier, as the Nabataean Aretas (al-Ḥārith) took Damascus in 82 BC, he saw himself as the successor to the Seleucids, a matter reflected in coinage, and described himself as a Philhellene (Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, 25).

²⁸ See, for instance, Dussaud, *Pénétration*, 74, 74 n. 2; Yon, 'Remarques'; Starcky, *Palmyre*, 53 ff.

²⁹ Drijvers and Healey, *Syriac Inscriptions*, D5, D7, D51, D101; Segal, 'Arabs', 93 – in a moment of especial self-confidence, the lords of Hatra, in the first century, adopted, in Aramaic, the title King of the Arabs (*malaka dhi 'Arab*) and, having ward off an attack by Trajan in 117, added the epithet *zakkaya*, the Conqueror: Bosworth, 'Iran', 596.

³⁰ Macdonald, 'Arabes en Syrie', 316 f.

³¹ The spoken language of the Nabataeans is disputed. Some maintain this to have been Arabic (for instance, Briquel-Chatonnet, 'Arabes', 39), others a dialect of Aramaic (Macdonald, 'Reflections',

not least given the limited content of inscriptions from northern Arabia, the variety of Ancient North Arabian languages would appear to be largely an epigraphic phenomenon, distinguished by little apart from alphabets; that they were early and related forms of Arabic is beyond doubt.³² What cannot be doubted is that these languages formed a continuum with what was to become standard Arabic in all its varieties, literary and dialectal.

The earlier situation involving peoples who were, for future reference, to be evanescent, or inscribed into the register of aetiological myths, is exemplified by the tribes of al-Ṣafā, mainly in the region corresponding to what is today south-central Syria and northern Jordan, who had dealings with the Nabataeans and are most likely to have had some connection with the regime of Palmyrene hegemony. In the thousands upon thousands of inscriptions, mainly graffiti, left by them,³³ one gains an impression of rudimentary territorial claims marked by primitive herms, cairns or rough stelae, commemorative inscriptions, and votive, supplicatory and other religious formulae, indications of internal conflicts, and conflicts with the Nabataean and Roman military,³⁴ including participation in an anti-Nabataean revolt at Madā’in Ṣāliḥ.³⁵ One finds reference to urban settlements or desert political centres with which they had dealings, including Buṣra and al-Namāra.³⁶ One can also reconstruct from the plentiful onomastic information on these inscriptions the picture of a tribal configuration with three major groupings, Hawālat, Ḍayf and ‘Awdh, along with some idea of their geographical distribution and seasonal movements.³⁷

But these peoples disappeared almost without trace, except for the odd cairn and what was incised on rock surfaces. Although some of the onomasticon was to persist in Arab names, some tribal names in evidence there seem only to have resurfaced with Abbasid antiquarianism, but located in different geographical regions;³⁸ whether this indicates ethnological continuity cannot be ascertained. It is unlikely that there was ever among them a durable form of organisation, unlike the situation in the region of Dedan and the constellation of settlements at the northern extremity of the Ḥijāz, involved in international trade from the eighth century BC, and disposed of

47 f.), and yet others an indefinite form of ‘North Arabic’ (Negev, ‘Obodas’, 60). In this regard, the transformation of the Nabataean rather than another alphabet into the Arabic alphabet, meticulously traced by Nehmé, ‘Glimpse’, is not insignificant.

³² See the discussion of Robin, ‘Langues’, 122.

³³ On whom see, in general, ‘Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 3.150 ff.

³⁴ Al-Aḥmad, *al-Muḥtama’*, 118 ff., 152 ff.; Harding, ‘Tribes’, 20; Graf, ‘Saracens’, 5 f.

³⁵ Graf, ‘Saracens’, 6. ³⁶ ‘Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 3.150.

³⁷ Harding, ‘Tribes’, 20; Macdonald, ‘Seasons’, 9 and *passim*.

³⁸ Harding, ‘Tribes’, 22 – see the genealogical chart on p. 24. It is noteworthy that unrelated groups with identical names were very common: Szombathy, *Genealogy*, 152, 152–3 n. 397.

a capacity for administration, defence, flood control, and a small measure of irrigation.³⁹ The Babylonian King Nabonidus resided at Taymā' for a decade (c. 553–543 BC).

The people who left us Safaitic inscriptions left no legacy to later Arabs, unlike the later people of Thamūd, whose legacy is memorialised in Arab and, later, Qur'anic legends. This may have had something to do with geographical contiguity, and perhaps with ethnological affinity as well. But crucially, it had to do with a relatively greater historical consistency resulting from the actions of empires, now taking a more methodical interest in tribal affairs, commencing with the Antonine period and ultimately moulding arrangements that, in an elementary way, could be considered as a step towards the Phylarchate arrangement. It might be stated at the outset that use of the term *Phylarchos* in the sources need not imply an official administrative title designating an office, but was also a generic and honorific term used very widely and not restricted to imperial confederates.⁴⁰

The Thamūd had already been mentioned in an inscription of Sargon II (721–705 BC), and appear in a number of classical and late antique sources, including Ptolemy.⁴¹ Later Arabic sources speak of them across areas bounded by Syria, the Ḥijāz and the Red Sea, probably the Gulf of 'Aqaba.⁴² A small number of inscriptions mentioning *tmd* or *h-tmd* are spread from northern Ḥijāz to Jabal Shammar, from the neighbourhood of Taymā' to the vicinity of today's Ḥā'il,⁴³ and some have been found very far to the south, in 'Asīr and between Mecca and al-Ṭā'if.⁴⁴ In 166–169, a small temple was erected at al-Rawwāfa, some 75 km SSW of Tabūk and 75 km from the Red Sea, on the sandy western reaches of the lava fields of the Ḥarra, but possessing underground water almost all year round.⁴⁵ This marked the formation of what the Nabataean inscription called *šrkt tmdw*, rendered in the parallel Greek inscription as *thamoudenōn ethnos*, the Nabataean expression above followed by *qdm y šrkt*.⁴⁶ This reference

³⁹ Al-Anṣārī, *al-Ḥadāra*, 86 ff. (Dedan), 105 ff. (Dūmat al-Jandal), 108 ff. (Taymā'); Bawden, 'Khief el-Zahra'; Macdonald, 'Reflections', 42.

⁴⁰ See Mayerson, 'Phylarchos', 291 f., 293 f. and 295 where the author argues *ex silentio* that the term made no inroads into Syriac, which continued to refer to Arab chiefs and princes as *rīṣē* or *malikē*. Cf. Hoyland, 'Arab kings', 381. A pagan female Saracen phylarch is recorded in a Greek inscription dated 319/20 south-east of Aleppo: Hoyland, 'Arab kings', inscription no. 11.

⁴¹ Beaucamp, 'Rawwafa', col. 1470.

⁴² Al-Masūdī, *Murūj*, § 929 – the author probably confounds them with the southern reaches of Nabataean domains, mentioning the necropolis of Madā'in Ṣāliḥ as their abode, in line with Muslim legend, and probably pre-Islamic Arabian legend as well.

⁴³ Beaucamp, 'Rawwafa', col. 1471.

⁴⁴ Al-Rasīnī *et al.*, 'Maṣḥ', 162, 165, 167, 181, 183 and pl. 92; *Aṭlāl*, 17 (1435/2002), pls. 6.2b, 6.4.

⁴⁵ Beaucamp, 'Rawwafa', col. 1467.

⁴⁶ See the texts with a French translation in Milik, 'Inscriptions', 55 f.

to the builders of the temple, through the good offices of the Roman legate Antisius Adventus, was combined with due praise given to Marcus Aurelius, here apparently uniquely given the epithet *mtm[kyn] l[k]l[']lm'* (rendered in Greek as *Cosmocrator*).⁴⁷

This commemorative inscription has been taken to signal the formation of a Thamūdīc confederation (*šrkt*), governed by chiefs or elders (*qdm*).⁴⁸ On the argument that *šrkt* is never used in a sense indicating a tribe or any congenital identity, Macdonald proposed that the term be taken to designate voluntary entry into the Roman military-administrative system,⁴⁹ which Graf and Macdonald have suggested might be considered to be the formation of a Thamūdean regular unit within the imperial army.⁵⁰ Another scholar saw in this no more than an informal recognition of empire rather than evidence of extensive Roman presence or hegemony.⁵¹

Whatever the interpretation, it is clear that we have here the first instance of the formation of a tribal group with a coherence imparted by a common name, used in all likelihood operationally rather than for genealogical reclamation, however durable this formation may have been. Moreover, this came to be under the impact of the Roman empire, in which the incorporation of territories and human groups within the imperial system of defence led to the emergence of operational inter-tribal articulation, buttressed by the imperatives of empire.

This Thamūdean formation may have been one among other, similar arrangements, traces of which have disappeared or are yet to be found. In the early third century, as this particular frontier was disrupted, and as Arabs started moving into Sinai from where Roman military presence was being withdrawn, with Palmyra incorporated into the empire, these *limes* became the last line of defence in the region.⁵² There is evidence of resultant lines of fortification and other defensive structures, including a fortress at al-Namāra,⁵³ which, as indicated above, has a longer history; this was where

⁴⁷ Bowersock, 'Bilingual inscription', 515, and *passim*. The fuller portion of the Greek text reads *kosmokratōn sebastōn megiston*. It should be noted that this is not the only inscription to mention Marcus Aurelius in the region: one dated 175–177 at Madā'n Šālīh salutes the emperor as well, in Latin, most probably indicating Roman military authorship: *Routes d'Arabie*, no. 121.

⁴⁸ Graf, 'Saracens', 11 f. After considering a variety of possibilities, the author suggests (15 f.) that the name Sarakēnoi, Saracens, may derive ultimately from *ŠRKT* interpreted as the equivalent of *ethnos*, duly generalised.

⁴⁹ Macdonald, 'Quelques réflexions', 98; 'Literacy', 99 ff., 100 n. 173.

⁵⁰ Macdonald, 'Quelques réflexions', 100 f.; Graf, 'Saracens', 11 f. ⁵¹ Fisher, 'Ghassān', 313.

⁵² Sartre, *Etudes*, 132 f. A general account of the Arabs and the south and south-east Roman frontiers between the second and the sixth centuries is given in *ibid.*, ch. 3, and Graf, 'Saracens'.

⁵³ For the strategic importance of this site, and its ecological characteristics, see 'Namāra', *EI*, 7.944b. The toponym seems originally to have been the name of the Numāra section of the Lakhm – see Caskel, 'Inshrift', 370.

Imru' al-Qays b. 'Amr,⁵⁴ 'King of the Arabs', may have been born, and where he may have been buried in 328 possibly as indicated by his famous funerary stele. These points were manned and organised, one would presume, by Arab principalities. We have a mention of 'Awdh, already encountered among the people of al-Ṣafā.⁵⁵ This period also witnessed the appearance in the sources of the personal names of Arab chiefs, the likes of whom had previously been anonymous.⁵⁶

The third century saw the extinction of Palmyra in 272 (by the Romans) and Hatra in 241 (by the Sasanians), following the annexation of the Nabataean polity by Rome over two centuries earlier. It also saw the full insertion of Edessa within the imperial system as a colony. Crucially for the purposes of this discussion, the resulting vacuum in the steppe caused Arab groups to gravitate towards the Roman borderlands.⁵⁷ It gave rise to Arab steppe principalities, to the use of the term Saracen to designate them, and to the earliest documentation of tribal names that were to persist genealogically and to be recorded in Arab traditions that have come down to us.⁵⁸ These principalities gradually adopted Arabic as their language of public expression, and ultimately Christianity as a religion. The use of Arabic as the language of official expression has been correlated directly with the fall of the Palmyrene regime and with its consequences,⁵⁹ and we shall see that these were of momentous significance for Arab ethnogenesis.

Such polities were born of the exigencies of imperial polities on both sides of the Barbarian Plain. A different regime was gradually put in place, at more or less the same time as the change in the nomenclature of the Arabs mentioned above. This regime eventually became the Phylarcate at its western edges,⁶⁰ repeating in the East a policy of subsidies and clientage instituted by the late Roman and Byzantine empires in Europe.⁶¹ If in the early fourth century Imru' al-Qays (d. 328) – King of the south Arabian Kinda,⁶² but originating from the B. Asad in north-east Najd, and therefore not actually Kindite but a chief over Kindites – was considered in Constantinople as a faraway Barbarian, matters changed considerably

⁵⁴ Note that Arabic sources speak of up to twenty-five persons with this name from the period we are dealing with ('Imru' al-Qays', *El*): many poets, including Imru' al-Qays b. Ḥujr (d. c. 550), the most celebrated of all poets, and at least two 'kings'.

⁵⁵ Graf, 'Saracens', 13, 16. ⁵⁶ Sartre, *Etudes*, 134. ⁵⁷ Cf. Butcher, *Roman Syria*, 408 f.

⁵⁸ Cf. Retsö, *Arabs*, 585. ⁵⁹ Cf. Dussaud, *Pénétration*, 63 f.

⁶⁰ For the ranks and titles of Jafnids, see Nöldeke, *Umarā'*, 13 ff., and Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 1.1.109 ff.

⁶¹ Cameron, *Mediterranean*, 47, 195.

⁶² But it must be borne in mind that the genealogies of Kinda are various (Ma'add, Rabī'a, Qaḥṭān), obscuring ultimate origins: Szombathy, *Genealogy*, 93 n. 230.

by the sixth century.⁶³ The same could be said of the earlier attitude of the Sasanians towards the Naṣrids of al-Ḥīra.⁶⁴ The result of these developments was the appearance of principalities allied to empires and south Arabian polities, acting as nodes that worked to weld the domains of the Arabs into an interconnected web. The system, and it was a system, may have operated fitfully, and may at times convey an amorphous image, but was yet cumulative.

This system covered almost the entire surface of Arabia and its northern extensions. Of the two principalities formed under the dominance of the ruling house of Kinda,⁶⁵ the First Kingdom, most likely with a base at Qaryat al-Fāw (Qaryat Dhāt Kāhil), a commercial town flourishing between the fourth century BC and the fourth century AD, was centred at a bottleneck on the road between Yemen and north-east Arabia. The precise identity of the dominant powers within it, and its association with Kinda and other groups, cannot always be identified with certainty. Its history is bound to that of Yemenite kingdoms; in the period of concern here, it was first under the hegemony of Sabaeans in the 220s, and then of the Ḥimyarites who annexed Saba’ in 275. Later, in the late third and early fourth centuries, this polity of Kinda was based probably somewhere west of today’s Riyadh.⁶⁶ Later still, from the late fifth century, the Ḥujrids, hailing from further north, took the lead as the ruling house – this was a dynasty without much of a tribal base, and was not a ‘martial tribe’, but was a noble house that relied on alliances and private corps of bodyguards, with princes of the ruling family exercising their authority from a variety of settlements.⁶⁷ This was not entirely unusual, and was to be the case with the Naṣrids at al-Ḥīra and with the Quraysh at Mecca. The Ḥujrid dynasty was a ‘harbinger of things to come’,⁶⁸ and was regarded by one scholar as a prefiguration of the early Muslim polity.⁶⁹ Ḥujrid Najd was an obligatory corridor of passage between south-west and north-east, a most important axis in late antique Arabia.

Its client relation to the south-west notwithstanding, the First Kingdom of Kinda, or, earlier until the beginning of the third century, with groups that came to be known generically as Qaḥṭān⁷⁰ – and we know

⁶³ Kavar, ‘Patriciate’, 78 and *passim*, and see Olinder, *Kings*, 114 f.

⁶⁴ Al-Ḥillī, *al-Manāqib*, 516. ⁶⁵ Al-Anṣārī, *al-Ḥaḍāra*, 101 ff., 126 ff.

⁶⁶ Olinder, *Kings*, 51 ff. ⁶⁷ Caskel, ‘Quellen’, 339 f. ⁶⁸ Hoyland, *Arabia*, 240.

⁶⁹ Robin, ‘Royaume hujride’, 665 ff., 671. See also Olinder, *Kings*, 51 ff.; Simon, *Meccan Trade*, 28 ff. Wellhausen (‘Mohammedanism’, 545) had already regarded this polity as ‘an epic prelude to the true history of the Arabs’, and Whittow (*Making*, 36) claims Zenobia’s Palmyra to have been their precedent.

⁷⁰ Robin, ‘Two inscriptions’, 169.

the names of two of the city's kings, Mu'āwiyat b. Rabī'at (who may have flourished *c.* 100),⁷¹ King of Madhḥij and Qaḥṭān who conquered the city from Qaḥṭān, and Rabī'at b. Mu'āwiyat (*fl.* *c.* 220), King of Kinda and Qaḥṭān⁷² – felt sufficiently confident to mint her own coins stamped with the name of Kahl, who appears to have been a chief or a chiefly deity.⁷³ Moreover, notwithstanding this south-west orientation, material evidence shows a very intense connection with the north-west as well: the presence of a bronze appliqué funeral bed in Graeco-Roman form, statuettes of Harpocrates, Heracles, Artemis and Isis-Tyche, and many other objects excavated there recently, betoken this connection.⁷⁴

This northern connection cannot have operated without a system of political and commercial alliances and, by extension, imperial connections. Details are forthcoming for the Ḥujrids, heavily implicated in the north, with connections to what is referred to as the nominal confederation of Tanūkh – how it was that the Lakhmid Naṣrids, who were not of the Tanūkh, established themselves as lords of al-Ḥīra in southern Iraq, in nominally Tanūkh territory, is still obscure.⁷⁵ The Naṣrids, even more than the Ḥujrids, were a ruling family whose dominance was based upon alliances, and enforced by retinues and private armies, rather than somehow 'emerging' from tribal relations and chieftaincy, and betoken decided social differentiation. Earlier, Imru' al-Qays b. 'Amr's famous funerary inscription of 328 at al-Namāra in southern Syria declares his bearing the crown, and his dominion, whatever this may have implied, over regions stretching to Najrān at the borders of Yemen,⁷⁶ prior to the Ḥimyarite push northwards. There is some dispute as to whether the northern alliance was officiated under Roman or Sasanian patronage;⁷⁷ the likelihood is that it was under both, simultaneously or in alternation in a way that was not unusual, the northern empires, unlike the Ḥimyarites,⁷⁸ desirous more for means of negotiating control, auxiliaries, and military and commercial stability in the steppe than for annexing territory.

In all events, Kinda fell victim ultimately to the Naṣrid-Ḥimyarite bids for the extension of control into the Peninsula,⁷⁹ but did, later, establish a

⁷¹ Robin, 'Antiquité', 95. Al-Anṣārī (*Qaryat al-Fāw*, 31) places him in the third century.

⁷² Robin, 'Antiquité', 95; Hoyland, 'Arab kings', inscription no. 1. ⁷³ Hoyland, *Arabia*, 50.

⁷⁴ *Routes d'Arabie*, nos. 154, 155, 158, 159, 165, 169. For a preliminary overall consideration of foreign imports and influences on metalwork at Qaryat al-Fāw, see Sinān, *al-Funūn*, 367 ff.

⁷⁵ Cf. Rothstein, *Lahmiden*, 41; Sartre, *Etudes*, 137; Hoyland, 'Arab kings', inscriptions nos. 5, 6.

⁷⁶ RCEA, no. 1.

⁷⁷ Al-Ḥillī, *al-Manāqib*, 107; Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century*, 31 ff.; Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, 138 ff.; Robin, 'Royaume hujride', 666 f., 674; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 49 f.; al-Anṣārī, *al-Ḥadāra*, 136.

⁷⁸ See Robin, 'Antiquité', 86. ⁷⁹ Cf. Simon, *Meccan Trade*, 28.

dominion based in Palestine towards the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth centuries. The system of alliances they controlled, in alliance with Anastasius (r. 491–518), seems to have foundered rapidly after the death of al-Ḥārith b. ʿAmr b. Ḥijr in 569/70. That Kinda appears at different times in different places before a final retrenchment in northern Ḥaḍramaut in the course of the later sixth century might be interpreted either as migration or as the rise and fall of polities set up in their name involving sections from within them.

Imruʿ al-Qays' northern sphere of influence in southern Syria and into northern Arabia was taken over for a brief period by the Christian Queen Māwiya in the 370s, whose tribal affiliation is uncertain but who seems to have been connected to Tanūkh, and whose rule might be regarded as the ancestor of the later Phylarcate.⁸⁰ She was in all probability succeeded by the Salīḥids, phylarchs of Rome, whose control seems on epigraphic evidence to have stretched all the way down to Madāʾin Ṣālīḥ in the fifth century.⁸¹ Thereafter a fairly constant, often fractious and fitful, and not always stable system was established under the Naṣrids (commonly but misleadingly known as Lakhmids) in the east and the Jafnids (commonly but inappropriately known as Ghassānids) in the west, who overpowered the Salīḥ, a system that resembled the role that Palmyra had earlier played in the steppe.⁸² The Jafnid al-Ḥārith b. Jabala (d. 569/70) was declared phylarch and patrikios by Justinian in 530. Thus was a political structure elaborated, no matter how shifting its day-to-day patterns, controlling the lines of communication, military as well as commercial, between south-western, central and north-eastern Arabia (and Iraq), veering westwards into the Syrian desert, the southern extension of the Fertile Crescent's steppe, marking territories being articulated with an increasing density of exchanges and relations of alliance, control, mutual recognition and contestation.

This period, with a decided intensification in the course of the sixth century, saw the induction of Arabs of the steppe, the oases and limitrophic settlements into the system of empire, increasingly as players, sometimes wayward players. This system had been conceived originally at once as defensive and offensive border maintenance, but it resulted in intensified regular communication between Arab groups that had hitherto been

⁸⁰ Bowersock, 'Mavia', *passim*; Hoyland, 'Arab kings', 381. Her territories are difficult to identify, but they are likely to have been the fringes of the province of Palestine (Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber*, 40, 40 n. 31). It should be noted that the name Māwiya was not uncommon among the Naṣrids and groups related to Tanūkh: al-Hilli, *al-Manāqib*, at Index.

⁸¹ Nehmé, 'Eléments', 52. ⁸² Cf. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, 142; Sartre, *Etudes*, 161.

relatively separated from one another, not yet having felt the imperatives of building large-scale territorial networks, alliances and exchanges. It is not unnatural that it led to some relative degree of homogeneity as to its internal workings. This took the form of large-scale polities relative to local conditions, of varying duration and extent, and of the introduction of royalist and quasi-royalist norms, enforced and reinforced by outlying empires in search of clients.⁸³ Internal means of communication, beyond commerce and resettlement or other kinds of transhumance, were reinforced and further organised with some regularity by the spread of imperial postal systems, a network of command and control, official communications and espionage.⁸⁴ The regime under discussion constituted a considerable, qualitative change over conditions that prevailed previously, not least as they were to accumulate and ultimately to constitute a heritage and a vectorial direction in the context of which setbacks and disturbances were followed by reassertions and reconstitutions of the networks in place, not infrequently by self-propulsion, and not only at the instigation of surrounding forces. This cumulateness accounts for the distinction between al-ʿArab al-ʿĀriba and al-ʿArab al-Mustaʿriba: the former the bearers of memories of vague names, an indefinite past, and often a mythical geography, the latter fully named and placed, presaging later developments, in a continuity that can be considered to have been fully ethnogenetic. In other words, this period marks a critical period, a 'phase transition' when the lines connecting the network become systemic vectors cumulatively binding together discrete local networks into durable and mutually recognisable traits.⁸⁵

Al-ʿArab al-Mustaʿriba: alliances of late antique empire

This period witnessed the gradual consolidation of a structural pattern of dominion attendant upon the formation by the Arabs of large-scale alliances or confederations of varying size, often unstable. These traced the spatial pattern of a network, along lines running from southern Syria/Jordan to southern Iraq, and then along a line leading from there through central Arabia to Ḥimyar. Another line followed the Euphrates northwards along the edge of the steppe, and yet another connected

⁸³ Fisher, 'Ghassān', 312, 333 f.

⁸⁴ Silverstein, *Postal Systems*, 43 ff., 46 n. 226, 49 – the term later to become standard, *barīd*, was already in use, on evidence of Arabic poetry and of a South Arabian inscription from the time of Abraha: *ibid.*, 47. See the account of al-Jāhīz, *al-Bighāl*, 66 f., where the author also quoted poetry by Imru' al-Qays mentioning his use of the Roman postal service for travelling to Constantinople.

⁸⁵ Cf. Malkin, *Greek World*, 38, 45.

Syria, with extensions along the western edge of the steppe, with northern Ḥijāz. Altogether, this pattern was supported by Romans, Sasanians and Ḥimyarites, and defines the period between the dissolution of south and south-east Roman defences and, some four centuries later, the end of the sixth century. This induction of Arabs into the imperial system of Late Antiquity might be seen to have been defined not by the geographical lines indicated alone – and territorial control had a variable geography – but by pathways of trade, and exactions, the extraction of natural resources, and warfare and dominance inside the steppe and the desert itself, articulated by nodes and hubs of communication and control whose size was commensurate with the demography of the region. What remains to be sketched in the paragraphs that follow is the consolidation and solidification of this system in Arab domains before it started to fray in the sixth century, making way for its definitive reanimation under the auspices of the imperial state of the Paleo-Muslim Medinan Caliphate and, later, the Umayyads.

Mention of al-Namāra above may now be brought in to highlight the pertinence, not only of the lines of fortification associated with it, but of associated facts as indices of an emergent regime of tribal consolidation in alliance with empire, perhaps prefigured by Thamūd at al-Rawwāfa.⁸⁶ The picture that emerges until we move into the sixth century is complex and in many details uncertain. What does seem to emerge is a pattern of regional systems of hegemony, sometimes of outright domination, reinforced by attempts at consolidation and expansion under imperial impulse, in all cases under royalised chiefly lineages with a tendency towards dynasticism, and with customary rights to exaction and the accumulation of wealth, bearing the title *malik*, positions of dominance often ratified by outlying imperial powers.

Three territories are of relevance to this pattern. Broadly considered, one comprised the Roman Palestines, with extensions up the Syrian desert to the east of Damascus and up to the Euphrates. Another was centred at al-Ḥīra, extending to north-east Arabia, often including coastal parts of it, and, somewhat fitfully, up the desert fringes of the west bank of the Euphrates. The third struck a path from southern Iraq through central Arabian Najd down to Yemen, often incorporating the northern reaches of Ḥijāz and areas around Wādī al-Qurā, on the road to Syria.

Thus from the middle of the third century, particularly during the reign of Shāpūr (r. 241–272), sections of the Tanūkh (with due regard to the

⁸⁶ Cf. Fisher, ‘Ghassān’, 314.

contemporary reality or unreality of this appellation) migrated from eastern Arabia and installed themselves in southern Iraq. Al-Ḥīra, under the leprous King Jadhīma al-Abrash,⁸⁷ was made into the capital of an Arab polity based on alliances and something like a standing army enforced by Persian cavalry.⁸⁸ A series of wars which may initially have involved conflict with Palmyra, and attempts at asserting control over the road to Syria and north-east Arabia, led eventually to the definitive installation of the long reign of the Naṣrid line over Lakhm in southern Iraq. Related tribal sections, under the name of Kinda, acquired hegemony⁸⁹ over an arc connecting southern Syria with the northern tip of the Persian Gulf, at one time, as we have seen, dislodged by the Naṣrids of al-Ḥīra (c. 525–528). The contestation was such that at one point, during the same period, al-Ḥārith the Kindite did install himself in al-Ḥīra itself for a brief period, after which the Byzantines installed him over a dominion in Palestine and southern Syria.⁹⁰ Hegemony over the north-east Arabia–Najd–Yemen axis, the original centre of power of the Kindites, over the Ma‘add, Madhhij, Nizār and other peoples, was exercised in tandem with the vigorous and expansive Ḥimyarites.⁹¹

It would be unreasonable to regard Kindite hegemony – the so-called Second Kinda – in the fifth and a good part of the sixth century as a unitary polity. There were clearly distinct principalities, one centred in the south of Syria, with waxing and waning influence over the north-east up to the Euphrates, and another in central Arabia,⁹² although this does not exclude occasional overall hegemony which seems to have been particularly the case under Imru’ al-Qays, whose influence seems to have extended to al-Jazīra, and to the irrigated agricultural region of Najrān in the south. The famous inscription on his cenotaph or funerary stele declared the extent of his dominion,⁹³ calling him King of all Arabs, at the time that the Naṣrids were consolidating their hold over al-Ḥīra. In all, the Kindites, individually and collectively, entertained shifting alliances with the Byzantines and the Sasanians; their inner-Arabian alliance with the Ḥimyarites showed more signs of durability, despite frequent Kindite-led

⁸⁷ On the settlement of Arab tribes in Mesopotamia, and their settlements, land holdings and markets under Sasanian oversight, see Morony, *Iraq*, 216 f.

⁸⁸ Cf. Jandora, *March*, 14.

⁸⁹ A particularly good treatment is in Sartre, *Etudes*, 156 ff. See also ‘Kinda’, *EI*. For an excellent map of Kindite domains and areas of influence, *Tübingen Atlas*, B.VI.7.

⁹⁰ Rothstein, *Lahmiden*, 87 ff.; Olinder, *Kings*, 65.

⁹¹ Piotrovskii, *al-Yaman*, 70 ff.; Smith, ‘Events’, 444 ff.; Gajda, *Royaume*, 77 f.

⁹² Cf. the comment of Caskel, ‘Inscription’, 371. ⁹³ Musée du Louvre, Inv. AO4083.

rebellions against the Yemenites.⁹⁴ At certain points in time the imperial balances of power worked to the advantage of these polities; the Kindites under Imru’ al-Qays clearly benefited from the Sasanian–Roman treaty of 297, disadvantageous to the Persians, and consolidated their dominions with the assent of both parties.⁹⁵

To a certain extent sedentarised, or at least basing their activities at permanent military and trading hubs – al-Namāra, and the commercial towns of al-Hajr, Thāj and the earlier Qaryat al-Fāw⁹⁶ – the Kindites and similar principalities were neither ‘Bedouin polities’ nor geographically indistinct. The Arabs had a continuous tradition of settlement in nodes of communication, which is little appreciated.⁹⁷ Their dynasticism betrayed marks of quasi-royalist social differentiation with its privileges and customary rights. It should be pointed out that, contrary to the impression one gains of desert and steppe polities involving primarily transhumant dominion over transhumant tribes, the picture that emerges upon scrutiny – and Beeston’s interpretation of Ḥujrid/Kindite dominion is, in this respect, exemplary – is one of command from settled locations, including agricultural settlements, from where military expeditions were sent forth to areas of interest, and tribute exacted.⁹⁸ With a backward glance from Paleo-Islamic polity, this seems to be one of several dress rehearsals of Arab tribal polities with moorings in permanent centres, consisting of networks of such centres which still require proper study, facilitating the production of a potentially pan-Arab koine memorialised in the repertoire of poetry, as has been noted by Shahid.⁹⁹

Kindite dominions in Syria had been gradually whittled away by the Salīḥ under the ruling lineage of al-Ḍajā‘ima, who entered the Byzantine system around 400, fought with the Byzantines against the Sasanians in 421–422 and 440–442, and joined them against the Vandals in Africa in 468. Having adopted Christianity, this house remained loyal to Rome (their remnants fighting with them against the Paleo-Muslim armies), but had already in the early sixth century started to founder before the Jafnids of Ghassān and the Naṣrids, who emerged eventually as the mainstays of a

⁹⁴ See Sartre, *Études*, 136 ff.; Kavar, ‘Byzantium and Kinda’; Caskel, ‘Inscription’, 377 ff.; Bowersock, ‘Bilingual inscription’, 522; Fisher, ‘Ghassān’, 317 f.

⁹⁵ Beeston, ‘Nemara and Faw’, 6.

⁹⁶ On the latter in relation to the Kindites, see al-Anṣārī, ‘Aḍwā’ jadida’, 8 f.

⁹⁷ Outlined in convincing detail by Ju‘ayt, *al-Kūfa*, 203 ff.

⁹⁸ Beeston, ‘Namara and Faw’, 4 f., who also notes that Imru’ al-Qays set up his sons in control over various settlements he subdued and used as centres of command. A concordant reading of this inscription is adopted by al-Anṣārī, *al-Ḥaḍāra*, 135.

⁹⁹ ‘Kinda’, *EI*, 5.119a.

more distinct imperial order among the Arabs.¹⁰⁰ The disintegration of the order imposed by Kinda in central Arabia made way for direct Yemeni incursions, and a greater involvement of al-Ḥīra in the affairs of the region.

Not much purpose will be served by narrating the political history of this system of hegemony over steppe and desert achieved by the Jafnids and the Naṣrids. What needs to be retained from their wars, raids and relations, often rough, with their sponsoring empires are elements that constituted their legacy to what was to come, 'foreshadowing events that were still, in 580, unthinkable'.¹⁰¹

The Jafnids, preceded by the Naṣrids, had established themselves in the regions dividing the Romans from the Sasanians by the time of the Sasanian–Roman treaty of 562. This treaty can be seen to mark the consolidation of a system of limitrophic control, as it gave official mutual recognition by the two empires of their client polities, and sought to establish a more stable situation by specifically stipulating that they refrain from mutual raiding.¹⁰²

This Jafnid/Naṣrid system functioned not without disturbance. The Jafnids tried to cement relations with the Sasanians just as, in line with imperial policy of keeping allies on a short leash by sustaining their enemies, the Romans subsidised the Naṣrids on occasion.¹⁰³ It persisted until both Arab parties to this arrangement started corroding, in good measure due to the policies of their imperial sponsors. Constantinople lost a crucial ally with the treacherous arrest and exile to Sicily of the Jafnid al-Mundhir b. al-Ḥārith in 581 who had, in 578, succeeded in conquering al-Ḥīra and holding it briefly.¹⁰⁴ This Christian dynasty and Byzantine Phylarcate disappeared definitively after the Byzantine defeat by the Sasanians in 614, and persisted thereafter only as part of the Byzantine army, while furtively and uncertainly ruling their former domains, until their final defeat by the Arab successors of Muḥammad in 628,¹⁰⁵ after which time many scions of the family joined Mu'āwiya and the Damascene Arab elite.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the whole system, military as well as economic, with an important emphasis on trade routes and access to Arabian natural resources, had begun to collapse in the third quarter of the sixth century,¹⁰⁷ as the Sasanians experienced

¹⁰⁰ Sartre, *Études*, 146 ff.; 'Salīh', *EL*. ¹⁰¹ Fisher, 'Ghassān', 334.

¹⁰² Kawar, 'Peace treaty'; Fisher, 'Ghassān', 327; Mitchell, *Later Roman Empire*, 394.

¹⁰³ Smith, 'Events', 437 f.; Fisher, 'Ghassān', 326, 331.

¹⁰⁴ Shāhid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 1.398; on the official imperial designations of this polity, *ibid.*, 1.109 ff. For an exploration of the reasons behind this Roman volte-face, Fisher, *Between Empires*, 174 ff.

¹⁰⁵ On which: Nöldeke, *Umarā'*, *passim*; Sartre, *Études*, 162 ff. ¹⁰⁶ Kennedy, 'Syrian elites', 195 f.

¹⁰⁷ For a very clear description, see Smith, 'Events', 467 f. and *passim*.

a grievous internal crisis, and the Romans were internally exhausted by events surrounding the abdication of Justinian II in 578. It might be added that this breakdown was exacerbated by the social consequences of unusual climatic conditions, plagues and seismic activity that marked this period, matters only infrequently indicated, and even less directly investigated.¹⁰⁸

As for the Naṣrids, they had become ascendant in north and east Arabia from around the 530s. Al-Mundhir b. al-Nuʿmān was crowned and declared King of the Arabian Arabs by Anōsharwān (r. 531–579), with dominion over Oman, Baḥrayn, al-Yamāma and south-west to the vicinity of al-Ṭāʾif.¹⁰⁹ Later, al-Nuʿmān b. al-Mundhir, having been crowned by Hormizd IV (r. 579–590), fell out with the Sasanians, who were clearly trying to assert more direct control over eastern Arabia, and was captured and executed by Khusrō II Parvez in 602, Sasanian patronage now being extended to the B. Ḥanifa in al-Yamāma.¹¹⁰ It has been claimed that the Sasanians had an official representative overseeing inner Arabia, *marzubān al-bādiya* or *marzubān Zārā*.¹¹¹

Yet soon thereafter Sasanian armies and their Arab auxiliaries were defeated by the Arabs under the leadership of B. Bakr b. Wāʾil (of the Kinda) at the Battle of Dhū Qār (of uncertain date, c. 611) near what was to become al-Kūfa in southern Iraq. This battle later assumed almost legendary status – on hearing of this, Muḥammad is reported to have said that this was the day on which the Arabs had obtained justice over the Persians (al-ʿAjam).¹¹² It is perhaps not entirely coincidental that it was the very same Bakr b. Wāʾil, under the leadership of al-Muthannā b. Ḥāritha, that initiated a further push, ultimately successful, into Iraq following the failure of the initial Paleo-Muslim Arab raids, first led by Khālīd b. al-Walīd, by the Persian counter-attack at the Battle of the Bridge, after which al-Muthannā took over command of the Arabs, his predecessor having perished in the course of the battle.¹¹³ This formed part of a series of events, the Arab conquests, which had, with Dhū Qār, become perhaps less unthinkable than it was in the 580s.¹¹⁴

The vacuum resulting from these events and lasting for half a century, and, in eastern and central Arabia, from the earlier collapse of Kinda and their attempted replacement by the Naṣrids in contest with Ḥimyar,

¹⁰⁸ Korotaev *et al.*, 'Origins', 245 ff., 263 ff. ¹⁰⁹ Simon, *Meccan Trade*, 332.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Simon, *Meccan Trade*, 30; Lecker, 'Taxes', 112, 115.

¹¹¹ Simon, *Meccan Trade*, 333. ¹¹² TAB, 291. See the details in AGH, 24.35 ff.

¹¹³ See the discussion of Morony, *Iraq*, 220.

¹¹⁴ See 'Dhū Kār', *El*, for a useful account of the battle and its uncertainties.

encouraged continued south Arabian interest in Arabia as a whole, including its western part, and increasing direct imperial intervention in its affairs. It could also be said that this, along with the consequences of some economic and strategic policies of Justinian, brought about the end of the relative isolation of south Arabia from the imperial systems in place, and eventually to the end of Ḥimyarite independence,¹¹⁵ unlocking Arabian terrains in which they had been very active. These events were to have an impact on Mecca and the Ḥijāz¹¹⁶ – it is not known if the south Arabians had a bardic tradition, but what is clear is that this break from isolation gave rise to a plentiful lore of royal legends recorded by ‘Ubayd b. Sharyah.

Ma’dikarib Ya’fur, King of Ḥimyar (r. 519–522), had already sent an expedition into central Arabia, and possibly further, up to the Euphrates,¹¹⁷ against al-Mundhir the Lakhmid, possibly as part of a Roman campaign against the Sasanian Kavādh (r. 488–531) – although recent work encourages us not to overestimate the pertinence of the proxy model for the interpretation of Aksumite, and, by extension, Ḥimyarite military campaigns prior to the time of Justinian.¹¹⁸ Like his predecessor Abīkarib As’ad, he added to his titulature his status of King of the Arabs of the High Country, presumably the Najd plateau, and of the coast of Ḥijāz, a practice continued by the Ethiopian general Abraha.¹¹⁹ Under Abraha (r. c. 535–565), the Ethiopian King of Yemen who used Ḥimyarite titulature and pressed Ḥimyarite claims, recorded in Sabaic inscriptions, an expedition was sent to central and western (presumably north-western) Arabia, and a revolt of Kinda in Ḥaḍramawt was suppressed.¹²⁰ Abraha had already subjugated the nebulous Ma’add, Kinda’s erstwhile central Arabian mainstay who, albeit early on dwelling to the west of al-Yamāma, had come to control the eastern shores of the Arabian Gulf, probably in the context of their alliance with Kinda, in the course of a campaign in 544.¹²¹

It has been plausibly conjectured that Abraha tried to sponsor the cemen-tation of a confederation to replace Kinda, based on Khath’am or Khuzā’a, until the landing of a Persian maritime expedition in Yemen in 576–577, leading ultimately to direct Persian rule in 599.¹²² In Arabia as a whole

¹¹⁵ Smith, ‘Events’, 463; Gajda, *Royaume*, ch. 4. ¹¹⁶ Gajda, *Royaume*, 53 ff.

¹¹⁷ Gajda, *Royaume*, 77 f. ¹¹⁸ Hatke, ‘Africans’, 405 f., 414 f., 417.

¹¹⁹ See Beaucamp *et al.*, ‘Persécution’, 74, 78.

¹²⁰ Beaucamp *et al.*, ‘Persécution’, 75, 79. On Ḥimyarite titulature, Gajda, *Royaume*, 188 ff.

¹²¹ Gajda, *Royaume*, 137 ff.; Smith, ‘Events’, 428, 435. The pertinence of import levies to military activity in this region is well brought out in *ibid.*, 442.

¹²² Piotrovskii, *al-Yaman*, 80; TAB, 267; Gajda, *Royaume*, 152 ff. and ch. 5. Piotrovskii (*al-Yaman*, 82, 148 ff.) proposes a convincing picture of tribal alliances in central Arabia during this period. For an overall picture of the Persian intervention based on what may be reconstructed from Arabic sources, see Daghfous, *Yaman*, 139 ff.

during this period that followed the collapse of Kinda, one might speak of a foundering of larger supra-tribal structures in favour of polities with softer structures,¹²³ which may perhaps contribute to explaining why it was that surrounding polities took on a more active, direct role in Arabian affairs, uncertain for reasons not unrelated to external powers.

The Jafnids had already made their presence felt in southern Syria and up the steppe to the Euphrates along the fringes of the desert east of Damascus; the establishment of an Arab confederate (*feodus*) of the emperor was, in effect, an act of recognition of power in place;¹²⁴ we know little of direct incursions of the New Rome in inner-Jafnid politics, but it would be fair to assume that they were not negligible. Al-Ḥārith had already been elevated by Justinian around 530, and the system of subsidies was already in place.¹²⁵ In 523–529, an Arabic inscription at Jabal Usays, some 100 km east of Damascus, in a slightly southerly direction, had declared that its author, Qutham b. Mughīra al-Awsī (Ibrāhīm b. Mughīra according to another reading), had been sent there on what appears to have been a military mission by *al-Ḥārith al-Malik* (the King).¹²⁶

In fact, there were grounds apart from vainglory or Roman ratification that caused chiefs of Jafnids to assume royal titles and prerogatives. As with Kinda and the Naṣrids, we have here an instance of quasi-royalist social differentiation, made possible by the formation of relatively large-scale polities facilitated by imperial politics, which had a transformative effect on the Arabs, as it had on the Germans.¹²⁷ The transition between chiefdom and kingship takes place when sufficient wealth is accumulated, in part through privileges and exactions, and spent to purposes of patronage, subsidy, sponsorship and paying retainers, on ostentatious display (including processions), itself a visible adjunct of royalty. Unlike a chief, a king draws upon political authority and military might, over and above social and 'tribal' mechanisms of control. He also receives a particularly lofty, even a transcendent consideration in panegyric poetry.¹²⁸

In addition to his and his family's (officially Miaphysite) Christianity, al-Mundhir b. al-Ḥārith (r. 569–582) adopted certain practices of the Roman elite. In any case, conversion to Christianity provided opportunities for

¹²³ Korotaev *et al.*, 'Origins', 248, offering an explanation in terms of a socio-ecological crisis.

¹²⁴ Sartre, *Études*, 164 f.; Fisher, 'Ghassān', 333. ¹²⁵ Fisher, 'Ghassān', 318 f.

¹²⁶ Robin and Gorea, 'réexamen', 507 and *passim*, with facsimiles at figs. 1–3; for the reading 'Ibrāhīm, Grohmann, *Paläographie*, 2.16 f.

¹²⁷ On these transformative effects, and their mechanisms, including the emergence of royalty, on Germanic peoples, Heather, *Empires*, ch. 2, *passim*.

¹²⁸ Al-Nuʿaymī, *al-Uṣṭūra*, 83 ff.

advancement through imperial recognition and the emergence of elites framed in imperial terms, quite apart from leading to settlement and its use by the Romans against Ctesiphon.¹²⁹ Al-Mundhir may well have had a general administrative role and obtained a reduced imperial tax burden that may help explain the clear prosperity of core Ghassānid territories.¹³⁰ These territories, centred at al-Jābiya south of Damascus and stretching across the fertile Ḥawrān (including Buṣra and Dar‘ā) have left plentiful archaeological records of prosperity both rural and urban.¹³¹ The security they maintained over the easterly stretches of the desert and steppe is signalled by the absence of evidence of defensive structures, including towers, characteristic of other regions.¹³² The Jafnids’ reach sometimes stretched all the way south to Taymā’ at the borders of Ḥijāz, and indeed possibly, on occasion, to the region of Yathrib (henceforth Medina).¹³³

More durably, this dominion stretched north along the edge of the steppe east of Damascus to al-Ruṣāfa (Sergiopolis), where the Jafnids maintained a ‘fortress-shrine’,¹³⁴ and constructed an audience hall with an inscription proclaiming, in Greek, al-Mundhir’s Victory and Fortune, *nikā hē tychē alamoundarou*. There, the Jafnids held court at the annual fair and pilgrimage at the shrine of St Sergius on 15 November, and welcomed and entertained the B. Taghlib and other Arabs of the desert and the steppe.¹³⁵ At both al-Ruṣāfa and al-Jābiya, but in Buṣra where there was also a shrine for St Sergius,¹³⁶ and in desert palaces,¹³⁷ and possibly also in monasteries around and in between,¹³⁸ they held court, projected authority and received their panegyrists, the greatest among whom was al-Nābigha al-Dhubaynī (d. c. 604),¹³⁹ who was to be so important to the canon of Arabic poetry. If prefiguration there was, it could be said with justice that the Jafnids prefigured the Umayyads. This might at least be said with reference to the

¹²⁹ Fisher, *Between Empires*, 39 ff.

¹³⁰ Sauvaget, ‘Ghassanides’, 121; Fisher, ‘Ghassān’, 321 f., 325. These territories of course shifted over time: Nöldeke, *Umarā’*, 44, 51 f.

¹³¹ Foss, ‘Syria in transition’, 240 ff., 250 f.; Sartre, *Etudes*, 178 ff.

¹³² Foss, ‘Syria in transition’, 247, 252. This is in contrast to the *limes* fortifications further north-east: Sauvaget, ‘Ghassanides’, 122.

¹³³ Sartre, *Etudes*, 187. ¹³⁴ Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 77 ff.; Sartre, *Etudes*, 172.

¹³⁵ Sauvaget, ‘Ghassanides’, 120, 127 ff.; Sartre, *Etudes*, 181 f.; Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 149 ff.

¹³⁶ Wood, *We have no King*, 238 f. ¹³⁷ See now Fisher, *Between Empires*, 206 f., 208.

¹³⁸ Sartre, *Etudes*, 182 ff. On Jafnid buildings, *ibid.*, 177 ff. It is interesting to note that the Jafnids reflected a complex pattern of local Hellenisation, characterised by a ‘structured detachment’. With one extant exception, they used Greek as an epigraphic language (Fisher, *Between Empires*, 57 f., 64; Genequand, ‘Some thoughts’, 78 ff.), a ‘default’ language, but not Syriac (Hoyland, ‘Arab kings’, 130 ff.). But they had no distinctive architectural style (Genequand, ‘Some thoughts’, 80 and 78 ff.).

¹³⁹ On these panegyrics, Montgomery, *Vagaries*, 147 ff.

Umayyads’ earlier phase prior to their having stepped into the shoes of their Roman predecessors, while they were still Arabian lords (see Fig. 1). The imperial, Umayyads’ home base was that of the Ghassānid House of Jafna, ‘to some extent, familiar territory’,¹⁴⁰ and they were allied with the same, initially Christian, tribes of Kalb, Judhām and others.

For their part, the Naṣrids left multiple legacies. One was administrative, of which there is little surviving evidence from the Jafnids, who seem, unlike them, to have had itinerant capitals,¹⁴¹ reminiscent of Kinda in moments of greater unity and extension. The Naṣrids seem to have had the institution of *ridāfa*, inherited within the clans of Yabu‘ of Tamīm, Sadūs of Shaybān, and Ḍabba and Taym Allāt of Taghlib, which was to be duly transformed later into the vizierate of the Abbasids. The Naṣrids were of course a lineage, not a tribe, not unlike the Umayyads, but had little intrinsic military capacity or local genealogical connection, no matter how these were sculpted and when in order to bring Muḍar within the ambit of their dominion.¹⁴²

There are also indications of internal urban organisation at al-Ḥīra,¹⁴³ of which we have little that has survived in the sources concerning the Jafnids. Their armies consisted of mercenaries, independent tribal levies having been used on some occasions.¹⁴⁴ In the final analysis, the legacy of al-Ḥīra was cultural and ceremonial, but also organisational; it seems to have been felt in Mecca more than that of the Jafnids, although it was the latter who showed the Umayyads the way on their Syrian home-ground, and who, in many ways, helped give shape to the earlier Umayyad period in Syria. It was not for nothing that later Arabising traditions, when they sought to defend pre-Islamic Arabs against detractors who charged them with barbarism, and insisted they ate disgusting things like rodents or blood pudding, bandied about a dish called al-Ghassāniyya.¹⁴⁵

Finally, it must be said that the legacy bequeathed by both the Jafnids and the Naṣrids was a certain political and cultural notion of Arabism, based upon what had by then been at least a century of intense articulation, incessant wars over control of its routes and nodes being indicative of its intensity. What appears to be a foundation legend for al-Ḥīra was expressed in the second half of the sixth century by one of their major court poets,

¹⁴⁰ Fisher, *Between Empires*, 210.

¹⁴¹ Nöldeke, *Umarā’*, 26.

¹⁴² Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 204, 253; Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishtiqāq*, 352 (both sources, along with others, are quoted by Kister, ‘Al-Ḥīra’, 149 f.); Morony, *Iraq*, 220.

¹⁴³ Piotrovskii, *al-Yaman*, 168 ff.

¹⁴⁴ Kister, ‘Al-Ḥīra’, 165 ff.

¹⁴⁵ Ibn Qutayba, *Faḍl*, 78; Ibn Sa‘īd, *Nashwa*, 2.792. No ingredients are specified, and no recipe is mentioned.

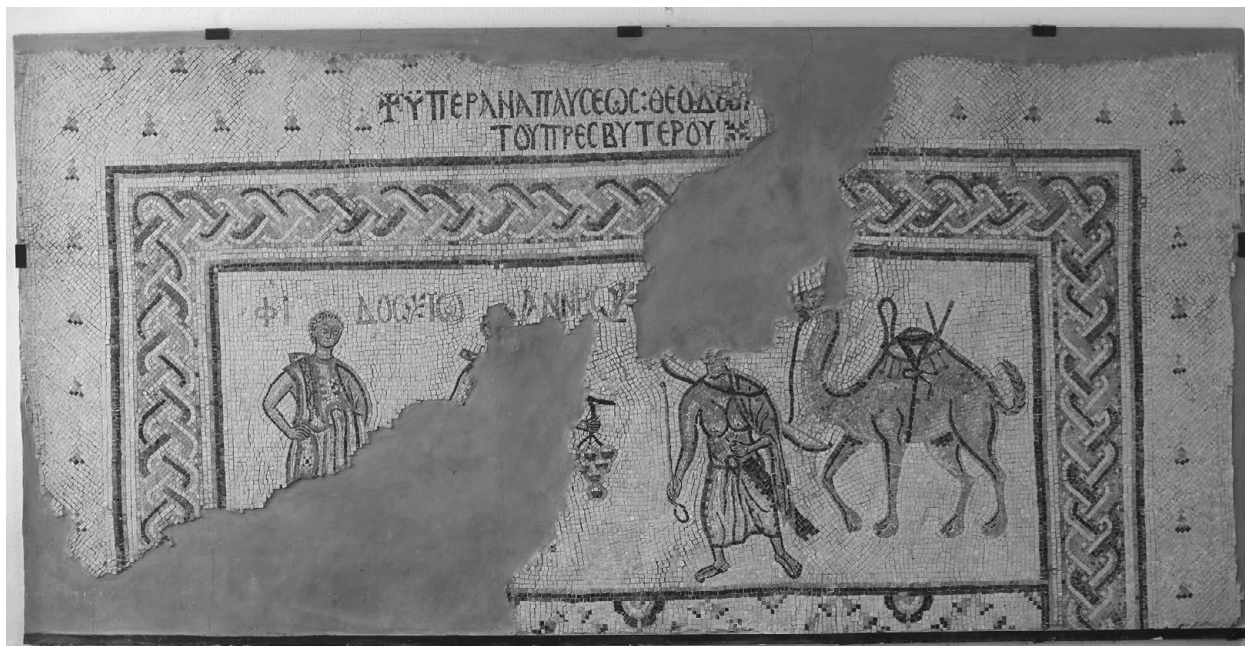


Fig. 1 Ghassānid figure. The western mosaic panel above the nave at the upper Kaianos church, Mount Nebo, Jordan. Upper part showing a man (presumably a Ghassānid warrior) leading a camel. Sixth century. Now at the Mount Nebo rest house.
 Text: + [invocative cross] *hyper anapauseōs Theodōr/t(?)* [= Theodoros or Theodotos, the rest illegible] *Tou presbyterou*.
 Translation: 'For the repose of Theodor/t . . . the presbyter.'
 Person on the left: *Phi-dos*, followed by a flowery ornament, then *Iō-annēs*.

‘Adī b. Zayd, claiming for al-Ḥīra succession to Palmyra and Zenobia.¹⁴⁶ Arguably the most significant of Arab cities in the three centuries preceding Islam,¹⁴⁷ al-Ḥīra was ruled by a royal house one of whose descendants reportedly refused a marriage proposal from Muḥammad on the grounds that ‘a queen does not give herself to a tradesman’,¹⁴⁸ and instituted rites of royalty on the Sasanian model.¹⁴⁹

This articulation was in many ways expressed in overarching genealogies, which call for a brief comment. These may or may not have been actually ‘remembered’, but were deployed according to what political circumstances required, genealogies themselves often being an expression of social relations at a given moment in time.¹⁵⁰ There is little doubt that overarching Arab genealogies were organised along lines reminiscent of an ancient ethnological lore prevalent in the steppe and desert, going back to the second millennium BC, including the division between southern and northern Arabs, material that was later to be related in Biblical genealogies.¹⁵¹

But operative genealogies were of much shorter duration; only a certain notional coherence was required by Imru’ al-Qays’ famous inscription mentioned above.¹⁵² It is of course unsurprising that references to biblical genealogies, and to the relation of the Arabs to them, a genealogy of the very upper and remoter reaches, should abound in Arabic legends and in ancient Arabic poetry, especially that produced within the Christian environment of the courts of the Jafnids and Naṣrids,¹⁵³ sometimes by Christian poets. The view that genealogies reflected only alliances of the moment or that they were mere rationalisations of later events is belied

¹⁴⁶ Toral-Niehoff, ‘Gestaltung’, 240. ¹⁴⁷ ‘al-Ḥīra’, *EL*. ¹⁴⁸ *SH*, 3.454.

¹⁴⁹ Al-Ḥillī, *Manāqib*, 107; Athamina, ‘Tribal kings’, 30, 32.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Goody and Watt, ‘Consequences’, 31.

¹⁵¹ Finkelstein, ‘Genealogy’, 116 f., 117 n. 86. Yet such genealogies need not be interpreted as Biblical interferences although these certainly existed in certain milieux (Millar, ‘Hagar’), nor need they be seen merely as a literary attribution by outsiders such as Eusebius or Sozomen (Sozomenos, *Historia*, 6.38.10; Brock, ‘Syriac views’, 15; Fisher, *Between Empires*, 162 ff.). Biblicism there may have been in some such genealogies, but one would need to consider the figures of Abraham and Ishmael here outside the Biblical paradigm, and perhaps beyond it, as heroes, not as prophets. Ishmael, Ismā‘īl, does not occur in pre-Islamic onomastics, inscriptions or genealogies (Dagorn, *Geste*, chs. 2 and 3, *passim*, and Rodinson’s Preface to *ibid.*, xxii–xxiii, where it is argued that, in Thamūdīc and Ḥijāzī onomastics, theophoric names with an imperfect verb construction are rare). But one needs to consider the occurrence of the name Ysm‘l in Safaitic inscriptions (al-Aḥmad, *Muḥtama*, 258, 285). There are some fifty such occurrences (but none in other Ancient North Arabian inscriptions), and some occurrences in Ancient South Arabian, especially Minaic (M. Macdonald, personal communication). The name Adam seems to occur in Safaitic inscriptions (Littmann, *Safaitic Inscriptions*, nos. 70, 85).

¹⁵² For instance, Millar, *Roman Near East*, 513 f.; Dagorn, *Geste*, chs. 2–3, *passim*. This is reflected in Arabic panegyric poetry, which makes little of distant origins and connections: Rūmīya, *al-Qaṣīda*, 35.

¹⁵³ Hirschberg, *Lehren*, ch. 2.

by empirical evidence, where inner-tribal conflict of a given moment is reflected in historical narratives in a way that tends to preserve, not skew, the fullness of actual conflictual relations at the lowest levels at which they operated. Such actual relations do not seem to have accommodated the requirement that conflicts of the moment be transposed into the register of genealogical distinctions,¹⁵⁴ and the concordance and mutual confirmations between genealogical works and ancient Arabic poetry are remarkable.¹⁵⁵

Al-‘Arab al-Musta‘riba: mechanisms of control

It has been suggested that the imperial ratification of the Jafnids and Naşrids in their regions of hegemony was in effect a recognition of a system in place. It must be stressed that, for all that is commonly said about the egalitarianism of desert and steppe Arabs, there existed a very decided reality to hierarchy and social differentiation, to the prerogatives of noble lineages and, within these lineages, of their chiefs.¹⁵⁶ An attitude of near-veneration seems to have been had towards chiefly lineages, to the extent that their blood was widely believed to cure rabies.¹⁵⁷ A *primus inter pares* asserted authority by wielding superior wealth and force unsentimentally. Pre-Islamic Arabic poetry is replete with a vocabulary of hierarchy, dominance and superordination, as it celebrated feats at arms.¹⁵⁸

Alliances were forged between lineage segments, not ‘tribes’, and, for all the genealogical lore deployed by poets and by chiefs, for praise or for symbolic and genealogical appeal, the higher ranges of genealogical trees, real or fictitious, served the political functions of expressing ideally military mobilisation and integration only at levels of state or quasi-state polities, rather than the concrete purposes of alliance.¹⁵⁹ In other words,

¹⁵⁴ See, for instance, the discussion of this matter with regard to ‘Abd Manāf and ‘Abd al-Dār within Quraysh: Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 5.

¹⁵⁵ Nöldeke, Review of Robertson-Smith, *Kinship and Marriage*, 117.

¹⁵⁶ Long ago, Goldziher had already commented negatively on Caetani’s notion of an Arab democratic ethos, noting that they were a ‘durch und durch aristokratischer Volk’ (letter to Nöldeke, 16 May 1907: Simon, *Goldziher*, 298).

¹⁵⁷ *Al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, 35.14 (‘Awf b. al-Aḥwas, c. end of the sixth century); *AGH*, 15.215 – this belief persisted into Islamic times, mentioned in a letter from ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān to al-Ḥajjāj (al-Drūbī and Jarrār, *Jamhara*, no. 36.1).

¹⁵⁸ Al-Shāyī, *Mu‘jam*, 97 ff.; ‘Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, vol. 4, ch. 47.

¹⁵⁹ Cahen (‘Notes’, 83 f.) discusses the question of legitimation in the context of Arabic historiography. Arab historians and genealogists had developed an inconsistent and imprecise vocabulary to distinguish various levels of genealogical segmentation (*sha‘b*, *jadhīm*, *ḥayy*, *jumbūr*, *qabila*, *‘imāra*, *baṭn*, *fakhdh*, *raḥt*, *faṣīla*, *‘ashīra*: Szombathy, *Genealogy*, 160 ff.). For this, and use for the classification of Arab groups, see especially al-Hamadānī, *Ujāla*, 6 f.; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, 2.284 f.; al-Sam‘ānī, *al-Ansāb*, 1.18; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Nizā‘*, 57; Szombathy, *Genealogy*, 60 ff. To what extent

genealogies must be treated as quite other than operative kinship ties,¹⁶⁰ which are often as conflictual as they are binding. Tribes, as suggested, result from politics, and do not emerge from nature, catalysed by military force and formed under the pressure of external circumstances and actors,¹⁶¹ in our case state or quasi-state polities galvanised by imperial sponsors. These act upon separate segments and facilitate their more durable crystallisation: segments which might resort to altering their genealogies under determinate conditions, as Arab historians were very well aware,¹⁶² considering the notion that ties of clientage and alliance are as effective practically as relations of blood.¹⁶³ At the Battle of Dhū Qār, for instance, it was not Bakr b. Wā’il as such who waged war on the Sasanians, but certain leading clans of B. Shaybān belonging to them; some of these later recomposed their relations with the Persians, and were initially reluctant to join the Paleo-Muslim armies, while during this celebrated battle many sections of Bakr b. Wā’il fought on the other side.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, during the Battle of the Camel in 656, we are told that the Yaman of Baṣra defeated the Yaman of al-Kūfa, and the Rabī‘a of Baṣra that of al-Kūfa.¹⁶⁵

The common model of acephalic segmentary kinship organisation is not of much use to the historian; it appears to be rather ideological than operative, not least as we are now discussing leadership, not clan recomposition at lower levels resulting from a variety of political and ecological circumstances.¹⁶⁶ Segmentation represents distinctiveness and often enmity at lower levels, and alliance at higher levels. For all the emphasis by the Arabs on the inviolability of honour (*‘ird*),¹⁶⁷ nobility (*‘izza*) and repute (*ṣif*), and for all the acute sensitivity to dishonour (*dhilla*), these notions related primarily to congenital collectivities of immediate relevance, in the

and in what ways this corresponded to early Arab usage is a matter for investigation, as is the extent and the settings in which it may have been deployed by this early usage.

¹⁶⁰ Lindner, ‘Nomadic tribe’, 690 ff.

¹⁶¹ Lindner, ‘Nomadic tribe’, 699, and cf. Kasdan and Murphy, ‘Parallel cousin marriage’, 26.

¹⁶² Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 1.235 f. The confusion and conflation of genealogies is a topic that claimed the attention of medieval Arabic historical writing; see, for instance, Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, 1.211 ff. and al-Hamadānī, *al-Iklīl*, 3 f.

¹⁶³ Al-Jāhiz, *Rasā’il*, 1.15 ff. At 1.11, the author calls *ḥasab*, relations resulting both from ties of marriage and from effective alliances rather than alliances of genealogical connections, as ‘a new birth’ resulting in conduct ascribed to that resulting from blood ties, reminiscent of Ibn Khaldūn’s famous discussion of blood ties real and virtual. See the comments of Bourdieu, *Esquisse*, 88.

¹⁶⁴ Donner, ‘Bakr b. Wā’il’, 28, 37. Similarly, the history of B. Asad, generically defined, is inadequate for historical consideration, requiring emphasis on separate segments and territorial relations (Landau-Tesseron, ‘Asad’, 4 and *passim*).

¹⁶⁵ Sayf b. ‘Umar, *Ridda*, § 259. ¹⁶⁶ Cf. the discussion of Lindner, ‘Nomadic tribe’, 692 ff., 700.

¹⁶⁷ *Contra* Goldziher, who famously spoke of *muruwwa*: Farès, *Honneur*, 30 f.

context of which the individual was derivative.¹⁶⁸ As if to underline this, women not infrequently joined their menfolk in battle mounted on a *dha'n* on camelback, with frame drums, with hair loosened, chanting encouragement in *rajaz* mode, their presence a token of their disgrace in case of defeat.¹⁶⁹

Individual honour, ferocious as it may have been, being dependent upon the collectivity, was, by some perennial covenant, deposited in the chief, the *sayyid*. Chieftaincy in a lineage segment is reproduced at progressively higher levels as well, and it was at each of these levels that alliances were constructed. Certain sections of clans were more equal than others; in the prevalent regime of power relations among tribes, often reflected in alliances, weaker parties were treated unequally in respect to liability for *diyya*, blood-wit, not unusually by a multiple of two.¹⁷⁰ Distinction could be achieved by generosity, hence the epithet *muṭ'im*,¹⁷¹ Provider, not unnaturally in a redistributive economy, and particularly important in times of dearth,¹⁷² using the lots of the *maysir*,¹⁷³ as a matter of 'covenantal obligation'.¹⁷⁴

But generosity, for all its importance, was by no means alone the distinctive mark of chieftaincy. This was marked by a number of prerogatives and customary rights, not the least of which was the exaction of tribute,¹⁷⁵ including a fourth of the booty captured by subaltern sections, often delivered, in kind, once a year at 'Ukāz,¹⁷⁶ and, one would assume, at other markets and fairs as well. This fourth, called *al-mirbā'*, was a particular category of the more general understanding of tribute, *iṭāwa*. Ḥujr, the father of Imru' al-Qays the king, extracted tribute from sections of

¹⁶⁸ Farès, *Honneur*, 110 ff. and chs. 2 and 3, *passim*. It is pertinent to note that, among the Arabs, suicide ('*afḍ*, *i'tifād*) following improvidence by individuals was practised in order for the individual not to appear to be needy: "'-f-d', *LA*; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, 6.397 ff.; and see Heck, 'Arabia without spices', 562.

¹⁶⁹ See the discussions among the Quraysh about bringing out the *dha'n* to the Battle of Uḥud in WAQ, 202, 206, 208, TAB, 389 ff. In some cases, women of uncertain status would also promise sexual favours to the victors of their own people, in *rajaz*: AGH, 24.54 f. Lammens ('Culte', 50 f.) likens the role women played in these battles to that of the Vestal Virgins of Rome, both repositories of collective honour. This aspect of warfare is represented in Arabian rock images: Macdonald, 'Goddesses, dancing girls', 283 ff.

¹⁷⁰ For instance, AGH, 13.148, 154, 156 (twice the amount for B. al-Ḥārith b. Zahrān than for B. Daws and their associates).

¹⁷¹ 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 4.580. See the list in WAQ, 128, 144 f., and Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1.72.

¹⁷² See the praise of Umayya b. Abī al-Salṭ (*Diwān*, 7.1) of such persons in times of need.

¹⁷³ Ibn Qutayba, *al-Maysir*, 43, 53, 77. ¹⁷⁴ Jamil, 'Playing for time', 64.

¹⁷⁵ For instance, AGH, 11.56 (Zuhayr b. Jadhīma al-'Absī, exacting a tenth of the wealth of Hawāzin before they attained this capacity in their turn).

¹⁷⁶ For instance, AGH, 5.17, 11.56. See in general, 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 4.266. Interestingly, chiefly lineages in al-Ḥīra under the Naṣrids would also claim this (Morony, *Iraq*, 220).

B. Asad, collected by special agents annually sent out.¹⁷⁷ Of captive women enslaved in the course of raids or wars, chieftains had the right of first choice among them, entirely at their discretion (*ṣafṣyā*), a portion reserved and excluded from the overall booty to be distributed.¹⁷⁸

The same Hujr, we are told, employed *ḥujjāb*, which should probably be taken to mean personal bodyguards rather than chamberlains, recruited from the progeny of Khaddān b. Khanthar of the B. al-Ḥārith b. Sa‘d, who had been under his protection since his reprieve,¹⁷⁹ presumably after having been taken captive and about to be put to death – a relationship of patronage and fealty which, one would assume, involved an oath. Kulayb b. Rabī‘a, a leader in the Basūs war, controlled access to pasture, water and the hunt, and required permission before any raiding took place in territories under this control.¹⁸⁰

Control of territory and declarations of territorially inviolable protected pasture (*ḥimā*), a private turf, were also chiefly prerogatives, individually and on behalf of the collectivity they led, acquired and defended with force against infraction.¹⁸¹ It cannot be emphasised sufficiently that transhumant Arabs did not quite conform to the image of nomads wandering about randomly and raiding opportunistically, although this latter did occur. Paths and locations of encampments, grazing grounds and underground water were coveted, and needed to be staked, acquired and protected. Territorial control was a chief concern and, apart from livestock, was the chief economic good; tribal and clan identities make little sense without indications of territory,¹⁸² and its mineral and, in certain parts, agricultural produce.

As a correlate, chiefs and chiefly lineages had the capacity to accord protection to individuals (*ijāra*, implying direct and continuous protection in the physical vicinity of the protector and his clan, or in his territory), and to allied groups. This relationship involved the workings of a code of honour, and can be correlated to a specific tie of personal allegiance and dependence called *walā’*.¹⁸³ Interestingly but unsurprisingly given the above emphasis on territory, the relationship of protection was officiated through a term, *ijāra*, connoting neighbourhood.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁷ AGH, 9.62. ¹⁷⁸ ‘Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 4.266; Jacob, *Beduinleben*, 215 f.

¹⁷⁹ AGH, 9.63. ¹⁸⁰ AGH, 5.24. ¹⁸¹ ‘Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 4.267 ff.

¹⁸² Cf. Morony, *Iraq*, 215, and Beeston, ‘Kingship’, 260, with a comparison with Anglo-Saxon England.

¹⁸³ It has been suggested that this tie is analogous to the *paranomē* (essentially a labour arrangement) as elaborated in Roman provincial law, and that the Arabian arrangement may have its origin in this law, or was an archaic version thereof (Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, 88, 99).

¹⁸⁴ See the semantic consideration by al-Shāyī, *Mu‘jam*, 21 f.

This code of honour was one in which preying upon the weak served only to increase glory and sonorous renown, celebrated in poetry, serving as the material-moral basis of honour.¹⁸⁵ Preying upon weaker parties served to enhance patrimony in slaves, livestock and territory, nobler captives promising commensurate ransom. Raiding (*ghazū*) is more complex than a proclivity for marauding, or armed robbery arising from need in the bleak ecological conditions. The power to subjugate is a correlate of the power to grant protection, and protection offered to men was continuous with inviolability offered to deities to whom sacred territory (*ḥaram*) is allocated. Inviolability is an elementary notion, in which the interface between the sacred and the profane is not always distinct.¹⁸⁶

Not unlike the territorial reservation of a *ḥimā*, sacred territory, *ḥaram*, was set up under a regime of control and inviolability by both men and gods, and a similar set of rules applied to both. No hunting was allowed in such locations, and a number of other restrictions applied, including the inviolability of fugitives.¹⁸⁷ Often enough, land was allocated to the deity or deities, where animals could pasture freely, on which we have epigraphic details from south Arabia, using the term *ḥmt*, cognate with the Arabic *ḥimā*.¹⁸⁸ That such locations were declared and demarcated (very likely with cairns) in situations where the groups undertaking to identify and protect them were claiming territorial dominance and allied prerogatives is indicated by many reports that we have. The B. Baghid of Gharaḥān of Tihāma, for instance, at a date close enough to the time of Muḥammad to have been remembered, declared themselves *busul*, like Quraysh, and instituted a system of truce months and, in competition with Mecca, in the third quarter of the sixth century, tried to establish a *ḥaram*. They were thwarted by a prompt military operation led by Zuhayr b. Janāb of the B. Kalb.¹⁸⁹ This incident is unlikely to have been the first in Arabia.

A *ḥaram* referred to the combination of sacred character and spatial boundary,¹⁹⁰ delimited and guaranteed by a controlling instance. Its spatial

¹⁸⁵ This is all well reflected in panegyric poetry: Rūmīya, *al-Qaṣīda*, 30 f., 35, 50.

¹⁸⁶ This is fully supported by the vocabulary employed, with derivatives of ḥ-r-m used for both. One instance is the *ijāra* of the notorious al-Ḥārith b. Zālim who, having fled al-Ḥīra following a murder he committed while a guest of al-Nu'mān the king, was offered protection by a succession of individuals, one of whom 'built a *qubba* over him', until he was admitted to the protection of Qatāda b. Maslama al-Ḥanafī's fortress, who declared that al-Ḥārith had sought his protection, reportedly using the expression 'taḥarrama bi'. Such a person with rights to inviolability was designated *basl*. Al-Ḥārith was then armed by his protector and given leave to practise highway robbery at a particular location, and later obtained protection from Quraysh, until he eventually joined the court of the Jafnids: *AGH*, 11.74, 80, 81 ff. and 19.16 (for *basl*). See 'ḥ-r-m', *LA*.

¹⁸⁷ For instance, *AGH*, 19.15, with reference to Mecca.

¹⁸⁸ Frantsouzoff, 'Sacred pastures', *passim*.

¹⁸⁹ *AGH*, 19.15 f.; Kister, 'Mecca and Tamīm', 42 ff.

¹⁹⁰ Gawlikowski, 'Sacred space', 301 f.

delimitation was signposted by various marks of enclosure, often involving the consecration of surrounding spaces (especially ravines, creeks and heights) for which there is archaeological evidence from the Negev and elsewhere, and which accord with reports in Arabic literary sources.¹⁹¹ Often, if not invariably, sacred locations included wells and trees.¹⁹²

Such indicators of dominion were of course multiplied as the range of domination expanded, and as we approach quasi-state polities. The Naṣrids deployed much the same mechanisms of extracting tribute and of cementing alliances using the usual combinations of inducement and menace.¹⁹³ But, like the Jafnids, the Naṣrids were kings. The title had been adopted by a number of lesser chiefs;¹⁹⁴ but, with them, it implied additionally formal recognition by neighbouring empires.

Lesser kings than those of the Lakhm and the Ghassān also appeared wearing crowns, *tījān* (sg. *tāj*), but we have no way of telling what materials these were made of, how they were designed and according to what norms, if any, or how they may have been improvised, although the assumption that these kings emulated kings of more consequence would naturally come to mind. They held court dressed in fine textiles, in a *qubba*, a canopy of tanned leather, generally red, and widely regarded as a sign of wealth and nobility.¹⁹⁵ The receipt of delegations from subaltern lineages was a regular occurrence during which allegiance and subordination were affirmed and reaffirmed¹⁹⁶ – the receipt of such *wufūd* (sg. *wafḍ*) was to be a significant feature in Muḥammad’s affirmation of his authority, and the recognition of this authority.

¹⁹¹ Nevo, *Pagans and Herders*, 84 f., 127, 129, 129 n. 20; Krone, *al-Lār*, §§ 7.1.1–2 and p. 389; Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 2.178.

¹⁹² ‘Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.405 f. ¹⁹³ Donner, *Conquests*, 45 ff.; Kister, ‘al-Hīra’, 153 ff., 157 ff.

¹⁹⁴ For instance, ‘Amr b. al-Itṣāba al-Khazrajī in Medina (*AGH*, 11.85 f.), and Ukaydir b. ‘Abd al-Malik al-Kindī, who controlled Dūmat al-Jandal during the time of Muḥammad, before submitting to Khālīd b. al-Walīd (*WAQ*, 1025).

¹⁹⁵ Ibn Sa‘īd, *Nashwa*, 1.286; al-A‘shā, *Dīwān*, 1.56, 4.46, 38.24, 76.8; *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, 10.9 (Bashama b. ‘Amr, c. late sixth century); Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shi‘r*, 1.106, 159. Lammens, *Arabie*, 103 f., 111 ff.; see *AGH*, 16.51; 9.63 (on the red *qubba* of Hujr mentioned above); 11.86, 88. Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān received the allegiance of his followers in a *qubba* at Ṣiffin, and received the Banū Hāshim in a similar structure (*TAB*, 888, 901). See Wellhausen, *Reste*, 130; Farès, *Honneur*, 100, 163–4 n. 2. Lammens (‘Culte’, 65 ff.) ascribes to all *qibāb* a sacral character, in an unnecessary extension of the fact that the Arabs carried their deities in such structures – these were multi-purpose canopies, used variously as reception halls, temporary prisons, for sleeping and dalliance and, when a person seeking protection was lodged in it, as a space inviolable except at the risk of war (*AGH*, 6.99; 9.65, 74; 16.244). It was also a mark of honour: when al-Nābiḡha al-Dhubayānī came to ‘Uqāz, he was put up in a *qubba* (*AGH*, 11.6). There were many kinds of such *qibāb*, the most prized being called a *ṭirāf* (Tabrizī, *Sharḥ*, 100 n. 53).

¹⁹⁶ Maršam, *Rituals*, 33.

Dress was also appropriately coded.¹⁹⁷ In addition, persons of noble status received lighter treatment for misdemeanours than others.¹⁹⁸ Indications are also that one of the marks of distinction for such royalising persons as of others of honourable or noble status, once captured at the losing end of a battle, and provided their captor was well disposed, was that they be put to death by having their *akḥal* vein – indicating those running inside the forearm and the leg – bled.¹⁹⁹

Receptions in red leather canopies and preferential methods of execution are of course no substitute for reception halls and palaces. Nor are they comparable to the special manners of address, coronations, insignia of power, including pendants, thrones, splendid attire, lavishly caparisoned mounts, ostentatious use of gold and precious stones, processions, panegyric poets, and other marks of royalty, continuing down generations.²⁰⁰ All such tokens of kingship or aspirations to kingship were imitated or emulated with less material elaboration and within the limits of means available, financial as well as ecological and technical, in manifestations of stark splendour. The difference between these grades of kingship did indeed lie in the disparity of means, itself reflecting the crucial aspect of chieftaincy and its various gradations, namely, territorial control,²⁰¹ entailing various degrees of power to command and coax, and of access to resources.

But the difference between kingship and its lesser assumptions does not reside in the availability of material resources alone. At a certain point in the widening of territorial dominion, however unstable, hegemony moved from a regime of alliance between groups that are presumed, however fictively, to be equivalent, to one of allegiance, in which a particular lineage is very decidedly and durably more equal than others, and within each

¹⁹⁷ This was later folklorised under the Umayyads. When al-Hajjāj commanded the poets Jarīr and al-Farazdaq to appear before him in the attire of their forefathers in the Jāhiliyya, they did so, with their dress and the use of the *qubba* duly put on display, the one as a prince, the other as a warrior (AGH, 8.56 – for Bedouin dress, AGH, 1.129).

¹⁹⁸ For instance, the young Abū Lahab in Mecca, caught pilfering the Ka'ba treasury while drunk, escaped the severe punishment (including banishment in one case) meted out to others; a role in establishing due punishments and exonerations seems in this case to have involved the lines of division between the Aḥlāf and the Muṭayyibīn – Kister, 'Strangers', 116 f. Median Jews may have applied the penalty of stoning for adultery to commoners, but not to nobles: Mujāhid, *Tafsīr*, § 337.

¹⁹⁹ Ibn Sa'īd, *Nashwa*, 2.622 and *passim*.

²⁰⁰ See in general 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 4.207 ff.; 'Athamina, 'Tribal kings', 30. The standard manner of addressing a king appears to have been, quite uniformly, the apotropaic *abayr* *l'la'n* ('may you counter malediction') – not infrequently interpreted in a rationalising ethical manner (for example, al-Nu'aymī, *al-Ustūra*, 86).

²⁰¹ This is properly highlighted as crucial by 'Athamina, 'Tribal kings', 33.

of which one man is more equal than other men.²⁰² This is also a transition from an unsteady regime of exactions and violent dominion needing continuous renewal by the deployment or display of force, to one of formal obeisance and a habitus of routinised obeisance. In this, an individual and his descendants in formal positions of authority implied a very special understanding of alliance, *ḥilf*, one in which assumptions of parity between contracting parties, however differential *de facto* but nevertheless asserted *de jure* for all parties concerned, are removed.

Here, the leading individual is offered homage and an oath of obeisance, normally called *bay'a*, signalled by a handshake: a *bay'a* for war, a promise of obedience, or a *bay'a* unto death (*'alā l-mawt*) in conclaves of war.²⁰³ The arrangement is a reciprocal but unequal commitment.²⁰⁴ Vertical hegemony, and a differential degree of reciprocity between contracting parties (including its expression in violent conflict), thus paved the way for super-alliances whose hinge was the superior individual contracting with every component of the alliance individually, indicating the achievement of kingship. This social differentiation and social stratification was particularly signalled by the Jafnids and the Naṣrids. We shall see later that this was to be Muḥammad's expression of supremacy, later reinforced by military conquest and, in time, duly transformed into a fairly stable arrangement by his successors once they established dominion over erstwhile imperial territory.²⁰⁵

Networks of articulation

These alliances comprised a crucial military aspect, but also a more elaborate use of the Arabs as suppliers and conveyancers, as sailors of the desert, with habitual trade routes and trading settlements and seasonal markets serving international demand and increasingly exigent local demand, including for luxury items consumed by the ruling houses and other elements of the upper crust, and for precious metals, in what amounted to micro-regional networks articulated with larger ones. Relative isolation in difficult terrain with limited resources but of military relevance works to encourage communication; and the greater the distances involved and the demand of outlying areas, the more valuable would the wares transported

²⁰² This point has been clearly brought out by Marsham, *Rituals*, 34 f.

²⁰³ See Pedersen, *Eid*, 56 f. ²⁰⁴ Marsham, *Rituals*, 55.

²⁰⁵ Heather (*Empires*, 43 f., 59 ff., 64 ff., 92, 150) sketches comparable developments among the Germanic peoples on the fringes of and inside the empire, and warns against the assumption of some kind of 'primeval bliss' among them before kingship.

need to be in relation to size and weight.²⁰⁶ Demand from the imperial territories surrounding the desert and steppe played a crucial role in sustaining trade.²⁰⁷ To this must be added gold and silver mining in Arabia, some going back to the Late Bronze Age,²⁰⁸ of interest to both local actors and surrounding powers, and conducive to fairly complex relations of exchange and the growth of organisational ability; the importance of mining resources is only just beginning to be appreciated.²⁰⁹ Of interest to local actors must also be added some agricultural products (especially wheat and dates) and artisanal production, particularly from north and south Ḥijāz, al-Yamāma and Yemen, and livestock and animal hides – these last suggestively likened by Crone to petroleum today, supplying the colossal demands of the Roman and Sasanian armies and of the Jafnids, with opportunities for significant war profiteering important to the Meccans.²¹⁰

Commercial and mining operations had, by the fifth century, become more than entrepot and cabotage operations linking enclaves of maritime trade extrinsic to their region. They involved not only local individuals but local communities who struggled over the control both of resources and of the conveyancing and purveyance of such resources as well as of imports and transit goods and the exaction of duty. In al-Yamāma, for instance, mining was controlled by sections of Bakr b. Wā'il.²¹¹ The appropriate model for describing these activities and their impact would seem to be one of the political control by local and trans-local chiefly lineages, in a context that involved both contestation and the building of alliances, very often supported by interested outside powers.

The production of perfumes, tanned leather, textiles, wool and jewellery would have been destined largely, but not exclusively, for the local or inner-Arabian markets. Yemen was particularly prominent in the production of textiles and perfumes; tanning and jewellery important in the Ḥijāz, the latter activity involving Jews in particular.²¹² Al-Yamāma, with a

²⁰⁶ Pentz, *Invisible Conquest*, 21. That Arabian commerce was a 'constant' of history was perceived by Miquel, *Islam*, 32 ff.

²⁰⁷ It should be noted that the demand for a variety of goods by the Roman armies in Europe was a decided stimulus for wealth accruing to Germanic chiefs and kings: Heather, *Empires*, 72 ff.

²⁰⁸ Heck, 'Gold mining', 381.

²⁰⁹ Its importance had been signalled by Morony, 'Late Sasanian', 37, who suggested it was mining rather than trade that may have accounted for economic expansion, which continued through the Paleo-Muslim period.

²¹⁰ Crone, 'Quraysh', 65, 66 ff., 75, who suggests that this need for leather for tents, scabbards, shields, kit bags, horse armour, water and wine skins, and much else, was driven by declining supplies from Syria.

²¹¹ Makin, *Representing the Enemy*, 127.

²¹² 'Ali, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 7-530 f. (dyeing), 534 ff. (gum arabic), 537 ff. (tanning), 540 ff. (wine), 561 ff. (jewellery), 587 ff. (leatherware), 594 ff. (textiles); Heck, 'Arabia without spices', 566 ff.

functioning irrigation system, produced leather goods, wheat and dates for export, and some jewellery.²¹³ Also for local consumption were agricultural products, particularly in northern and southern Ḥijāz²¹⁴ – mention of this particular region is due to the fact that, for agriculture as well as for manufacture, this is the region for which we have the most information. Not unnaturally, such trade involved the use of weights and measures, quantities and magnitudes. These were normally expressed in very local denominations, and those about which we have information are, again, mainly of Ḥijāzi provenance, which seem largely to have followed Syrian and Iraqi norms and practices.²¹⁵

Weights and measures were of course particularly important in monetary and quasi-monetary operations,²¹⁶ and Arabia seems to have been an important source of precious metals.²¹⁷ Gold and silver were denominated in weights equivalent to Roman gold and Sasanian silver currencies, with some use and equivalence for *waraq*, which may refer to Yemeni coins.²¹⁸ There are indications that money was indeed the ultimate measure of measures, forming the basis of weights overall, at least among the Meccans.²¹⁹ But by and large, it was uncast bullion rather than coins that underwrote transactions not directly attainable through barter, and whatever coins circulated were reckoned by correspondence to bullion weights.²²⁰ Clearly, the extraction of, and trade in, precious metals was not only a major source of wealth, apparently traded with Syria and subject to duties imposed by Ghassān.²²¹ It also required, and in consequence inculcated, skills of organisation and accountancy, some on a wide scale, and may safely be assumed to have encouraged exactions of excise and tribute. Mines have

²¹³ Al-Askar, *al-Yamama*, 51 f. ²¹⁴ Heck, 'Arabia without spices', 565 f.

²¹⁵ 'Ali, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 7.627 ff.; 'Measurement', *EQ*.

²¹⁶ On which see the material in 'Ali, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 7.489 ff.

²¹⁷ See the excellent map of gold deposits and mines in *Tübinger Atlas*, A.II.2, showing locations in the Ḥijāz (the environs of Medina and areas to the north and north-east), near al-Ḥīra, and elsewhere. Heck ('Gold mining', 367 ff., 371 ff., 384) provides a compendious picture, based on archaeological remains as well as literary sources, of mining for precious metals in the Ḥijāz, Najd and al-Yamāma, and of the involvement of local as well as outside interests (Montgomery, 'Empty Hijaz', 45, berates a certain imprecision in Heck, but nevertheless finds his indications plausible; this is clearly just a beginning). Al-Askar (*al-Yamama*, 50 f.) provides details of mining for gold and some silver and the extraction of salt in al-Yamāma. Piotrovskii (*al-Yaman*, 80) spoke of an invigoration of silver mining in the Yemen immediately after the Persian conquest following 570.

²¹⁸ Heck, 'Gold mining', 370; 'Arabia without spices', 556; 'Money', *EQ*; 'Ali, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 7.498, 501; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 3.98. There is a possibility that Aksumite coins may also have been a point of reference; wrq, in Ge'ez, refers to gold, in ESA possibly to silver (G. Hatke, personal communication with reference to S. Hay, 'Madhariba hoard of Aksumite and late Roman coins', *Numismatic Chronicle*, 1989, 83–100).

²¹⁹ 'Ali, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 7.500. ²²⁰ Heck, 'Arabia without spices', 555 f.

²²¹ Heck, 'Gold mining', 556.

left a lasting physical imprint excavated by archaeologists: smelters, tools, wells, fortifications, quarries and entire mining villages.²²²

The complex interplay of local territorial interests and claims, and the interests of outside parties, would have been negotiated in terms of the long-range networks of trade, of the external and internal interests and provenances of the caravaneers and traders in bulk. These had military and political implications, including the security of sites and passage, and the forms of commercial cooperation devised to cope with these complex interactions. Naṭāt Khaybar seems to have acted as a node of monetary regulation and exchange, a rudimentary banking clearing house *avant la lettre*.²²³ The operations of *muḍāraba* and *qirād* – *commenda*, broadly understood – seem to have been the principal fiducial mechanisms used,²²⁴ and a certain level of accountancy practice by a *khārīṣ* or a *ḥāsib* is indicated in the case of Medina, the latter person doubling as a land surveyor.²²⁵ There is also evidence of various forms of credit and usury.²²⁶

The impact of these networks on the habituation of those who mattered among the Arabs of Arabia to extra-local relations and certain forms of organisation cannot be denied. Less formal, but no less considerable, skills will have been required for the organisation of seasonal local markets, of which there were very many in Arabia.²²⁷ They can be classified into two different types, those offering goods for local needs, and others carrying out emporium trade serving a variety of local needs as well as long-range and international trade. A variety of techniques of negotiation and bargaining, some of them bizarrely coded,²²⁸ were used. We have information on the negotiating and bargaining techniques specific to many such markets, as well as on the commodities traded.²²⁹ Some such markets had an association with cult. But in general they provided what would normally be available on such occasions, such as clairvoyants and various entertainments, including

²²² Heck, 'Gold mining', 379, 386. We have no idea of the labour regimes employed, but the use of slave labour would not be an unreasonable assumption. Heather (*Empires*, 79, 134 f.) underlines the importance of, among other products, the local, northern Polish and wider infrastructures of the trade in amber in the first two centuries AD.

²²³ Al-Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 356.

²²⁴ The *Commenda* was to become a fundamental element in classical Muslim commercial law (on which see Udovitch, *Partnership and Profit*), and is today used as the ostensible basis of 'Islamic banking'.

²²⁵ *SIH*, 3.231; *WAQ*, 721. ²²⁶ Al-Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 60 ff.

²²⁷ A general catalogue of these was compiled by al-Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 226.

²²⁸ Al-Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 46 ff. Some of these techniques – described in a manner that brings to mind the coded gestures of stock exchange traders today – were later to be rationalised, and some prohibited, by Muḥammad on grounds of unfairness: *ibid.*, ch. 5, and al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 3.91 f.

²²⁹ Al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 2.161 ff.; al-Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 236, 241, 278, 292 ff., 297 ff.

trained monkeys, and prostitution, usually of slaves procured by their masters, diviners, scribes, mediators, physicians, and others.²³⁰

It can safely be assumed that all ritual elements connected with alliance and conflict were conjugated with the concrete economic, social and political control over markets and the socio-geographical relations they sustained. We are told, for instance, that the seasonal market at Dūmat al-Jandal was 'owned' by named chiefs from segments of Kalb and the Jadīla of Ṭay', masters of the territory.²³¹ But of course this, like other reports, contains no chronological elements, and the turmoil of the Arabian Peninsula in the second half of the sixth century was such that control would have varied ebulliently with time; it is reported that the Jafnids ran this particular show on unspecified occasions.

Moreover, a form of monopoly was in operation whereby no commerce was transacted by individuals until the goods sent by the king or controlling chief had been sold.²³² A similar arrangement is unlikely to have obtained for the goods sent for sale by the Naṣrids (by annual caravan called the *laṭīma*) to 'Ukāz and at markets in Yemen, this transaction overseen by the representative of al-Ḥīra there.²³³ The famous 'Uqāz itself was in the middle of nowhere;²³⁴ archaeological excavations of its possible site indicate no settlement of any kind preceding the Umayyads,²³⁵ and its precise location within a roughly defined territory was clearly a negotiated affair that varied over time. The market at al-Mushaqqar was controlled by the segment of B. 'Abd Allāh b. Zayd of Tamīm, who oversaw it on behalf of the Sasanians, the latter receiving 10 per cent of the fees and levies collected.²³⁶

No levies were reported to have been imposed upon transactions at 'Ukāz, and no overall control seems to have been in operation beyond what will have emerged from negotiations at this location, held by local interests distant from centres of royal or imperial authority. Yet the market was said to have 'belonged' to Qays 'Aylān and Thaḳīf, and the land to B. Naṣr, though in what sense we cannot tell. One report names an individual, Ṣulṣul b. Aws b. Mujāshin of Tamīm, as being in charge of arbitration at this market, and it is not clear if such a function, whatever its specific

²³⁰ Al-Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 236, 281. The Qur'ānic injunction against procuring is stated at Q, 24:33.

²³¹ Al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 2.161; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 1.313. ²³² Al-Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 236 f., 244.

²³³ *AGH*, 22.42, 24.39. It may be noted that not all such caravans had safe passage, and some may have been raided: Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Munammaq*, 428 f.

²³⁴ The location is described in 'Arrām, *Tibāma*, 79 f.; on the uncertainties of its location, and the possibility that it may have been an extended territory across which market activities moved, al-Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 286 ff., and al-Anṣārī, *al-Ḥaḍāra*, 166.

²³⁵ Al-Muaiḳel, "'Ukāz", 2, 16. ²³⁶ Al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 2.162; Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 265.

definition, ran in a lineage.²³⁷ Traders there were of the Quraysh, Hawāzin, Ghaṭafān, Qudā'a, al-Muṣṭaliq and Meccan Aḥābīsh, without specification of segments.²³⁸ The market of Rābiya in Ḥaḍramawt, inaccessible without properly armed escort, was organised by Quraysh in agreement with the B. Akil al-Mirār of Kinda and B. Masrūq.²³⁹ Journeying from Yemen and the Ḥijāz to the market at Dūmat al-Jandal used a system of alliances concluded by Quraysh and Tamīm with groups whose territories were to be traversed, to which was added transit and protection payment to groups not party to these alliances.²⁴⁰ Needless to say, markets close to imperial territories were directly controlled, quite apart from the levies at customs stations. In southern Syria, at Buṣra, Dar'a and Dayr Ayyūb, annual and more permanent markets were taxed and controlled directly by the Jafnids.²⁴¹ At al-Mushaqqar, the Sasanians ensured that the market would not operate when Tamīm tried to take control of transactions.²⁴²

As always in such circumstances, crucial to the enracination and spread of common conventions and habits was the existence of hubs of hegemonic elaboration. In this sense, the so-called 'buffer principalities' discussed above were in transition under conditions of vectorial accumulation: both as elements in imperial systems, and as points of 'phase transition' from the short-lived arrangements of Arab politics to durable polities at a higher level of organisation and reach.

In this context of the overarching theme of Arab ethnogenesis, markets can be seen to have acted not only as nodes for the distribution of goods and services, but, like the courts of the Naṣrids and the Jafnids, as nodes of accumulating familiarity, skills, negotiations, knowledge of imperial domains and Arab dynasties further north, and broadening knowledge horizons. These included knowledge of distant genealogies and of Arab mythical, legendary and aetiological lore of various geographical provenances, and its elaboration into parallel and, ultimately, shared or coordinated narratives which, one may also assume legitimately, will have compacted the various redactions of events in an indefinitely distant past into a shared, ethnogenetic aetiological past.

In all cases, crucial to our considerations are the forms of control over these markets, of which one important aspect is timing. The Arabs had approximate chronological frames which will be discussed in some detail

²³⁷ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 182; al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 2.166.

²³⁸ Al-Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 291. ²³⁹ Al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 2.165.

²⁴⁰ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 264 f.; al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 2.162. This material was put to very good use by Kister, 'Mecca and Tamīm', 128 f., 134.

²⁴¹ Al-Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 362 ff., 372 f. ²⁴² Al-Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 242.

in the next chapter. The accounts we have in the sources speak of a fairly precise set schedule for each market according to the months of the Hijra calendar and, in some cases, as a result of astronomical computations,²⁴³ which is most likely to be a later organisation of the material available.

As might be expected, chronological reckoning had a highly local character, with the likelihood that the Naṣrids and the Jafnids followed imperial calendars in place,²⁴⁴ as did other Arab groups before them (the funerary inscription at al-Namāra is a clear example), with Ḥimyarite Yemen having its own well-organised calendar of months and years.²⁴⁵ For the rest, we have chronological reckoning by major events. But overall, it seemed necessary practically to bring the annual lunar cycle into some form of synchrony with the solar, which regulated the rhythms both of agriculture and of transhumance, and of the markets as well.²⁴⁶ In all cases respecting the Arabs, however, a counting of the moons was a main way of determining an approximate schedule. We have a very clear case of calendrical synchronisation in Greek inscriptions and bilingual Arab–Greek papyri showing that, in Palestine, at least as early as seventy-seven years before the Hijra, a dating system by months *katā arabas* was used, enmeshed with the Roman calendar of months and indictions.²⁴⁷

There is no case for postulating the existence of an overarching instance that controlled synchronisation. At the local level, at least that involving the movement confined to local groups, synchronisation is likely to have been one that coordinated lunations with the rhythms of social time, the time of seasonally determined transhumance, itself on occasion associated, as we shall see, with a cultic calendar, more or less like an almanac. Lunation is, after all, the more evident measure of the passage of time, marked nightly by shifts in position of the moon unmatched by the much slower shifts in the regularity of the sun's position above the horizon. The timing of more important markets, particularly major ones such as the famous 'Ukāz, those on the borders with Syria, and those located at maritime emporia in east and south Arabia, will have followed the rhythms of the monsoon winds and those of east Mediterranean time reckoning.

Nevertheless, a habit of synchronisation will have grown out of the circumstances described, no matter how uncertain its workings, leading

²⁴³ Al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 2.161 ff.; al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār*, 291.

²⁴⁴ Note that an ecclesiastical letter (Simeon's New Letter), estimated to have been dated July 519 and written at the Jafnid al-Jābiya, used the Seleucid/Alexandrian calendar: Shahid, *Martyrs*, 54, 63, 236.

²⁴⁵ 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 8.518 ff., 446 ff.; Rodinson, 'Espace', 47 f.

²⁴⁶ Rodinson, 'Espace', 25 ff., 28 ff., 35. ²⁴⁷ Meimaris, 'Arab era', 178 ff., 184.

to a common regime of time as a horizon. Pan-Arab markets and fairs were the affair of those elements involved in long-distance commerce, a level of pan-Arabian integration which might be seen as a higher level of integration among elites which were also active at lower, more local levels.

Whatever the mechanism of synchronisation, a far more important feature was actual territorial control, and the rights to the exaction of charges on transactions. Local markets were venues of shifting inter-group negotiation and networking, and doubtless the issue of timing and synchronisation formed part of this. Control seems to have involved a combination of territorial claims, forms of local domination, often contested, alongside negotiation and alliances. The major local markets – ‘Ukāz being the best known to posterity – were more than opportunities for trade. They were the occasions for contracting and declaring alliances, declarations of war, adoption, the acknowledgement of paternity, genealogical amalgamations and false genealogical claims,²⁴⁸ as well as the collection of tribute, imposts, and gifts due to superordinate individuals or segments from weaker ones, the sale of captives or manumission of slaves, and the collection of ransom paid for persons seized in the course of raiding. They were locations for the public announcement of peace between warring parties, sometimes with outside intervention or mediation.²⁴⁹ They were also occasions for the exaction of vengeance or the payment of compensation in cases of homicide,²⁵⁰ or for public declarations of protection, asylum, adoption or ostracism.²⁵¹ The choice of a particular place to conclude a pact, declare paternity and so on, in the public domain, would depend, one would suppose, on the relevance of such actions and declarations to parties present, who would not only witness but also draw the consequences.

In short, seasonal fairs and markets were *par excellence* the occasions for Arabian socio-political transactions, and these needed to be publicly declared in order for them to carry proper force. The pact ending the Basūs war, events which took place at locations very far distant from where the pact was declared, is an index of the extent of internal Arabian concatenations and of external involvement in this. The formal declaration

²⁴⁸ On adoption, paternity, genealogical amalgamations and false genealogical claims, many of whose features are not entirely clear and the image of which is confused in scholarship, see Landau-Tasseron, ‘Paternity’.

²⁴⁹ For instance, the peace between Bakr and Taghlib at the end of Ḥarb al-Basūs, concluded at Dhū al-Majāz near Mecca, mediated by the Lakhmid king ‘Amr b. Hind (r. 554–570), who received hostages from both parties as guarantee: *AGH*, 11.29 f. On the notoriously cruel ‘Amr, see Rothstein, *Lahmiden*, 46 ff.

²⁵⁰ Jacob (*Beduinenleben*, 144 f.) noted long ago that not all blood required blood, and that long-running vendettas were not a primary feature of the vengeance system among the Arabs.

²⁵¹ Al-Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 278 ff.

of the outcomes of negotiation was expressed in, and affirmed by, a formal vocabulary, resulting from the formality of oaths accompanying them.²⁵² This was an elaborate matter, studied in detail by Pedersen, who divides oaths among the Arabs into two broad categories, the promissory and the assertoric. The former, which fall under the general category of alliance (*ḥilf*, also involving *muwāda'a*, *aqd* and *ahd*),²⁵³ involved oaths and, most often, written documents²⁵⁴ – the availability of scribes and writing materials at markets has already been mentioned,²⁵⁵ and the use of seals is attested.²⁵⁶ There is also evidence from Yemen of standard epistolary formulae, and of a variety of commercial documents, and lists of personal and clan names.²⁵⁷

The other category, assertoric oath, included *qasāma* later to become formalised in classical Muslim law as a method of proof or denial in cases of murder: bearing oath as witness, of guilt or innocence, of paternity or illegitimacy, and quite a number of other matters.²⁵⁸ The *qasāma* category of oath, used as an instrument in adjudication, is anthropologically a most interesting phenomenon, being connected to conceptions of quasi-judicial proof that used magical practices of mutual imprecation (*mubāhala* and *mulā'ana*), expressed in the perfect tense,²⁵⁹ involving elements comparable to ordeals,²⁶⁰ in a sublimated form, and hypothetical curses used concomitantly to confirm or confound accusations made.²⁶¹ It might be appropriate to note that *mubāhala* was used by Muḥammad as a challenge

²⁵² See, in general, 'Oath', *ERE*, 9.430–8. Arabic vocabulary appears to have been the richest among Semitic languages in this respect: Pedersen, *Eid*, 6 ff.

²⁵³ Pedersen, *Eid*, 21 f., 27 f.; Qatāt, *al-'Arab*, 216 ff.

²⁵⁴ Pedersen, *Eid*, 7 f., 11, 188 ff.; al-Asad, *Maṣādir*, 65 ff. Marsham (*Rituals*, 26 ff.) translates and comments upon one such document (Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Munammaq*, 90 f.) supposedly between 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib b. Ḥāshim and Khuzā'a, and discusses alliances as they are portrayed in Arabic poetry (at 29 ff.).

²⁵⁵ See Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 475 and 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 7.291 ff. The Qur'ān enjoins people to put loan contracts in writing (Q, 2.282), which cannot have come from nothing. For writing materials, see al-Asad, *Maṣādir*, 80 ff., and, especially, Maraqtan, 'Writing materials', who uses what material evidence is extant in addition to literary sources. During the Paleo-Muslim period, under the Umayyads, St John of Damascus stated that Muslims used witnesses for marriage, purchase and the acquisition of property (text in Sahas, *John of Damascus*, 768a), highlighting old habits which he clearly found extraordinary. Al-Jāhiz (*al-Hayawān*, 1.69) quotes poetry by al-Ḥārith b. Ḥilliza al-Yashkurī (d. c. 570) relating to the peace concluded at Dhū l'Majāz mentioned above (note 249) as involving written documents as well as witnesses and guarantors. This gives us a vivid picture of procedure, though the poet wonders if agreements inscribed on delicate and expensive sheets of cloth associated with Sasanians (*mahāriq*) will ever serve to diminish the force of passions. Indeed, the 'folia of the Persians' (*mahāriq* *al-Furs*) was a fairly standard topos in ancient Arabic poetry conveying the sense of evanescence and passage. See for instance, *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, 25.1 (al-Ḥārith b. Ḥilliza al-Yashkurī), and 'h-r-q', *LA*.

²⁵⁶ Al-Asad, *Maṣādir*, 75 f. ²⁵⁷ Al-Ansārī, *al-Ḥadāra*, 146. ²⁵⁸ Pedersen, *Eid*, 179 ff.

²⁵⁹ Pedersen, *Eid*, 86 f. *Mulā'ana* was to constitute part of later Muslim divorce law, as an accusation of adultery. We cannot tell if it had been thus used in pre-Islamic times.

²⁶⁰ 'Mubāhala', *EL*. ²⁶¹ Pedersen, *Eid*, 103 and ch. 5, *passim*.

to prove the authenticity of his divine commission and that of the Qurʾān (Q, 2.94, 3.61). Assertoric oaths were also related to divinatory techniques involving games of chance, including divinatory arrows (*istiqsām*) or ‘cups’ (*aqdāḥ*).²⁶²

Crucial to all these operations from the perspective of this discussion is their public character. Also publicly declared was ostracism,²⁶³ an eminently political act which disarmed individuals, by removing them from the protection of congenital social moorings, rendering them liable to enter under the protection of a different group, with implications for inter-segmental relations. The island of Ḥaḍūdā off the coast of Ḥijāz seems to have been used on occasion for the confinement of such individuals, although under what conditions, under whose auspices and involving what category of delinquents is unclear.²⁶⁴ Such persons so ostracised as were unable to arrange for protection were condemned to a life of wandering, flight and robbery to which we have extraordinary poetical testimony by Taʿbbaṭa Sharran, ʿUrwa b. al-Ward and other such *ṣaʿālīk*.²⁶⁵ These seem to have constituted a specific category of individuals coalescing together in bands of brigands, active in regions to which they staked claims, or joining chieftains as bodyguards or militias.²⁶⁶

Vows were also declared at markets, but not exclusively in such locations unless they were considered to have public political implications. Not unnaturally, there were ritual and other symbolic elements involved in such public declarations, with the use of fire,²⁶⁷ often at sacred locations, appeal to deities and oath formulae deployed.²⁶⁸ The famous *ḥilf al-muṭayyibīn* of Mecca, the Alliance of the Perfumed Ones, was not the only one involving the immersion by contracting parties of their hands in perfume in sealing their compact.²⁶⁹ Immersion of the hands in liquids, including blood, and

²⁶² Pedersen, *Eid*, 12, and see, very suggestively, the more general and comparative discussion in Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 76, 79, 81, 83 f.

²⁶³ Pedersen, *Eid*, 77 – a person thus removed from congenital social relations is termed *khalīʿ* or *ṭarīd* – in later Arabic usage, the former term came to be applied to libertines. On the various categories of ostracism, Khulayf, *al-Shuʿarāʾ*, 91 ff. See also AGH, 22.42.

²⁶⁴ AGH, 19.5 f.; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam*, s.v.

²⁶⁵ On this poetry, Khulayf, *al-Shuʿarāʾ*, *passim*, and 257 ff. for formal considerations and, in shorter compass, Wagner, *Dichtung*, 1.135 ff.

²⁶⁶ Khulayf (*al-Shuʿarāʾ*, 55 f., 76 ff., 108 ff., 116 ff., 131) describes the categories of persons in such bands (ostracised persons, rebellious sons of black slaves, and paupers), and the geographical distribution of their activities in regions of relative wealth and the proximity of markets.

²⁶⁷ *Al-Mihāsh* was the special term used for those concluding an agreement around a fire: al-Shāyī, *Muʿjam*, 51.

²⁶⁸ Pedersen, *Eid*, 143, 151 f., and ch. 9 and 10, *passim*; Qaṭāṭ, *al-ʿArab*, 216 ff.

²⁶⁹ Al-Tabrīzī, *Sharḥ*, 129 n. 18.

sacrifices of various kinds, are also attested in the context of contractual agreements, as is the conclusion of contracts at cultic settings.²⁷⁰

Vows, particularly vows of revenge, involved the entry of vowing individuals into a condition in many ways analogous to the *iḥrām* upon entering sacred ground, as has long been realised.²⁷¹ This involved abstentions that may well reflect different regional or cultural practices, from wine, sex, meat, and from trimming, greasing and washing hair.²⁷² The sacrifice of hair among the Arabs following pilgrimage (during which, it seems, hair had been matted)²⁷³ is well known, to which might be added that this seems also to have been practised following success in revenge, as part of mourning rites, and when deciding upon war.²⁷⁴

Related to the public character of these transactions were performances, generally of a poetical character, which involved slanging matches between various segments present. These, the *mufākhara* and *munāfara* between lineages, were widespread,²⁷⁵ in evidence in ancient Greece and among the Germanic peoples as well, and designed to confirm and reconfirm boundaries between collectivities.²⁷⁶ It might be added that there was a pacific form of inter-tribal poetry, the *munṣifāt*, which highlighted the excellence of all parties in a verbal duel, and whose relatively restricted areas of prevalence, Ḥijāz and Tihāma,²⁷⁷ may reflect certain conditions of the region in the period immediately preceding Muḥammad. Such contests also served, in the context of vengeance, to establish social parity determinant of the choice of victims in cases of blood revenge.²⁷⁸ It would be useful to mention here what was called *futyā al-a'rāb*, in which participants competed in answering linguistic riddles.²⁷⁹

A kind of virtual warfare in peace-time, such *munāfara* and *mufākhara* poetry may have been seen as metaphorical arrows launched by the *jinn*

²⁷⁰ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 128; Pedersen, *Eid*, 26 f.; Bonte, 'Sacrifices', 50.

²⁷¹ Cf. Wensinck, 'New year', 24, and Pedersen, *Eid*, 120 f.

²⁷² *AGH*, 9.66, 10.230, 13.15 and cf. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, 30. ²⁷³ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 2.213.

²⁷⁴ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 124; Morgenstern, *Rites*, 84 f., 104 ff., whose general explanation in terms of analogies between the sacrifice of a new-born infant's hair and circumcision (58 f.) is not entirely clear to me; Chelhod, *Sacrifice*, 131 f., 133 ff. In a proleptic sign of ultimate victory, warriors of B. Bakr shaved their heads before entering the famous war of al-Basūs, the day duly being memorialised as *yawn al-tahālūq* (*AGH*, 24.54). Shaving as part of mourning rituals persisted thereafter into Paleo-Muslim times; members of the Ṣūfīyya Kharijites shaved their heads when visiting the grave of their leader Ṣāliḥ b. al-Musarriḥ (Ibn Durayd, *al-Isbtīqāq*, 217). Pursuing comparisons between Arabs and pagan Nordic peoples, note that it is said of King Harald that he vowed not to cut his hair or comb it until he had conquered all of Norway: Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, 61, 78.

²⁷⁵ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Munammaq*, 103 ff.; 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 4.589 ff.; Farès, *Honneur*, 40 f., 42, 185 ff., who compares these to religious ceremonies.

²⁷⁶ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 68 ff., 84. ²⁷⁷ Agha, 'Verse', n. 50.

²⁷⁸ Stetkevych, *Zephyrs*, 63. On 'blood equivalence' in this context, see Proksch, *Blutrache*, 10.

²⁷⁹ See 'Alwān, *Mu'taqadāt*, 7 f.

inspiring the poet at his collective adversaries.²⁸⁰ Relating great deeds of heroism in a duelling *Sitz im Leben*, poetry was declaimed by women in the energetic mode of *raġaz*, described as *Augenblicks poesie*,²⁸¹ this is tantamount to a duelistic performance in which the poets act out a virtual battle between lineages. Conflictual or conciliatory, these poetic contests, often publicly judged as competitions in verbal dexterity, were important elements in creating a confluence of human elements together celebrating themselves in the form of what later became *al-ayyām*.

One should also stress that this will have involved elements of Arab genealogical, aetioloical and legendary lore that was thereby spread and elaborated, connected, and made into common ethnogenetic knowledge. It is also well to note that, along with poets, storytellers and orators also held forth in prose on these occasions.²⁸² More important in view of long-term developments is the formality of the setting in which poets proceeded to declaim poetry to a great degree stylised. Formality, of which ritual is one extremity, identifies, confirms and memorialises positions and relations, and correlative memories, in a manner appropriate for retention. Formal performance of this kind stores information in transmissible and cumulative forms, of which Arabic prosodic forms were but one.

This will have led to a greater elaboration of mutual awareness among various Arab groups of disparate provenances, now circulated in the form of sagas and legends, poetical and doubtless prosaic as well. It might also be said that these contests represented the local manifestations of the wider reach of the poetry patronised and produced by the Arab principalities of Jafna and Naṣr.²⁸³ These courts acted further to professionalise poetic production and make it into a gainful activity, which would have contributed to greater elaboration and skill in poetic composition.²⁸⁴ In addition, oratory at these markets, a topic yet requiring basic research, and quite apart from the gnomological content of some of these which may have contributed to a common Arab fund of proverbs and a common moralising horizon, was also used for the conveyance of information and of lore, including the delivery of *ayyām*. The documentary style of the latter survived long

²⁸⁰ Zwettler, 'Mantic manifesto', 79.

²⁸¹ Wellhausen, 'Poesie', 594 f. – the term is, of course, reminiscent of Usener's *Augenblicksgötter*.

²⁸² Jones, 'Language', 37. For linguistic and stylistic aspects of this oratory, particularly assonance and parallelism (synonymous, antithetical and synthetic), see Beeston, 'Parallelism', 134 f. followed by Jones, 'Language', 44 f.

²⁸³ Cf. al-Asad, *Maṣādir*, 109 f., 112 ff.

²⁸⁴ Particularly with al-A'shā and al-Nābigħa al-Dhunbyānī: Rūmīya, *al-Qaṣīda*, 68, 79 f., 167. Notorious instances of covetousness involving al-A'shā are related in *AGH*, 9.89, 93.

(discussed in *ALS*), and is reflected in certain portions of the Qur'ān and in the Constitution of Medina, discussed below.²⁸⁵

Like orators and storytellers, poets were public voices for their peoples, declaiming heroism and honour according to a template of public pronouncement, whose prosodic structures were yet another mark of mutual recognition.²⁸⁶ Equally important, poets also seem to have been charged, at fairs such as 'Ukāz, with the dissemination of information, and relating the deeds of their people in the previous year,²⁸⁷ beyond private word of mouth, clearly for the public record. Be it information or poetry, this practice was ubiquitous, and is comparable to the Greek *panīgiris*, to which a special edge is added by panegyrics and elegies. What emerges from this picture is that the poet performed a social role, and a political one, arising from the social control over poetry and of what it disseminated and memorialised.²⁸⁸ Poetical declamation of personal and collective deeds is, after all, a constituent component of collective honour, which needed to be declaimed sonorously; renown (*ṣīṭ*) is, after all and as conveyed by the connotations of the word, a sonorous phenomenon, and the declamation of repute.²⁸⁹

As has been suggested, it was not only tribal deeds that were memorialised. The Arab legendary role was memorialised and circulated around the Peninsula in a variety of forms prosaic as well as poetic. References to what were later known as al-'Arab al-'Āriba, to 'Ād of Iram and to Thamūd, as well as to other legendary peoples and figures, were legion, related by poets who hailed from and circulated their words way beyond the localities mythogeographically indicated by these legends.²⁹⁰ They were clearly

²⁸⁵ Jones, 'Language', 42 f. ²⁸⁶ Cf. Wellhausen, 'Poesie', 600.

²⁸⁷ Al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 2.170; Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 263 ff.; *AGH*, II.36 (on 'Amr b. Kulthūm of Taghlib) and *passim*.

²⁸⁸ Cf. Detienne, *Invention*, 57 n. 36.

²⁸⁹ Cf. the discussion of the archaic and ancient Greek *klēos*, which means very much the same thing, as 'sonorous renown': Svenbro, *Phrasikleia*, 8, 20.

²⁹⁰ By way of example: 'Ād are mentioned by Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā, Ṭarafa b. al-'Abd and al-Nābigha al-Dhubaynī (Arazi and Masalha, *Early Arab Poets*, s.v. 'Ād in Index), as well as by Laqīṭ b. Ya'mar al-Iyādī (Tabrīzī, *Sharḥ*, 284 n. 49), and are alluded to by the reference to Iram by al-Ḥārith b. Hilliza in his *mu'allaqa* (Tabrīzī, *Sharḥ*, I.68 and 288 n. 68). Iram is also mentioned by Imru' al-Qays, as was Thamūd (Arazi and Masalha, *Early Arab Poets*, 157). Details of the story of Qudār, the villain of Thamūd, are ascribed to 'Ād by Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā, which would betoken some confusion of registers unless one accepts the identification of Thamūd with 'Ād al-Akhira, the Second 'Ād (Tabrīzī, *Sharḥ*, I.32 and 133 n. 32), an identification which Bell (*Commentary*, 2.321) held to have been an attempt to evade the difficulty presented by the interpretation of the First 'Ād in the Qur'ān. Ṭasm are mentioned by al-Ḥārith b. Hilliza (Tabrīzī, *Sharḥ*, I.49). On the myth of Thamūd (poetic evidence for which is plentiful: Bin Ṣarāy, *al-Ibil*, 105 ff.) and the figure of Qudār, with cross-cultural parallels and a consideration of possible relations to the genesis of this legend become myth under conditions of Nabataean hegemony over northern Ḥijāz, see Stetkevych, *Golden Bough*, ch. 6.

disseminated in south Arabia as well; Wahb b. Munabbih has a detailed account of the destruction of ʿĀd.²⁹¹ The extensive and fascinating myth of Luqmān b. ʿĀd and his seven birds of prey, prompted by a voice to try fate at the Meccan heights, related by ʿUbayd b. Sharyah during the reign of Muʿāwīya in Damascus, had already been the subject of poetical treatment by Labīd b. Rabīʿa, al-Nābigha al-Dhubayānī and al-Aʿshā.²⁹² In the context of ethnogenesis, this common fund of representation will have been the result of local and regional lore coordinated through the variety of agencies and processes discussed in the two centuries preceding Muḥammad.

So it was clearly the case that there was a pan-Arab mythical, tribal and poetical lore that was circulated across Arabia very widely indeed, percolating from the nodes of connection that were the seasonal markets and royal courts. Much of the above found its way into the Qurʾān in a manner so terse as to lead to an assumption of implicit knowledge. Of events transfigured by mythical redaction, that of Abrahā's alleged attack on Mecca, at the Battle of the Elephant, repulsed by a heavenly host figured as birds, may well have developed into a full-fledged myth by the time it found its way into the Qurʾān.²⁹³

The Arab tongue²⁹⁴

The above discussion of late antique Arabs focused on a variety of mechanisms of internal social, political and cultural articulation among them and across very wide territories, and on their habituation to interconnections resulting from the interests of surrounding empires and lesser states, a system into which local interests, including Meccan local interests, were incorporated. It is suggested not that the Arabs of the time regarded themselves as a potential unified polity, but that there was cumulative development towards ethnogenesis. The designator 'Arab' occurs hardly at all in poetry, and the Qurʾān does not refer to the Arabs as an ethnic group. But it does refer to 'an Arabic Qurʾān' and to the Arabic language (Q, 12.2, 39.28, 41.3, 42.7, 43.2); and substantive 'Arab' starts occurring with

²⁹¹ Wahb b. Munabbih, *al-Tījān*, 51 ff.

²⁹² *Akhbār*, 'Ubayd b. Sharyah, 380 f. The myth itself is related in *ibid.*, 369 ff.

²⁹³ This had already been suggested by Bell, *Origin*, 74. The battle to which the Qurʾān refers seems indeed to have taken place, with only temporary gains, but in all likelihood somewhere around Turāba, some 300 km distant from Mecca: Gajda, *Royaume*, 144, 142 ff.

²⁹⁴ 'Tongue' (*Lisān*) is often used in Arabic as a synonym for language, as in older English usage and, of course, in French. *Lisān al-ʿArab* is also the title of the colossal Arabic dictionary by Ibn Manẓūr (d. 1311/12), often used in this book.

increasing frequency in Paleo-Muslim poetry.²⁹⁵ It can be said that it was the Tongue of the Arabs that came to define those peoples who were to become Arabs. It was language that encapsulated in symbolic register the ethnogenesis of al-ʿArab al-Mustaʿriba; it rendered them, with time and very rapidly, Arabs, both to themselves and to others.

If the Arabs had no sense of emergent common political identity, the Arabic language as it developed in the centuries before Muḥammad was nevertheless to be of great moment, by developing a koine that complemented the growing network of communication and mutual awareness and recognition in the steppe and desert,²⁹⁶ at the same time as surrounding populations came to designate them as Sarakēnoi and Tayyāyē. Both fostered eventually a sense of distinctiveness of the kind that, given a crystallising political agent, could become ideologically emblematic for certain types of political and cultural action. It was this sense of an emergent socio-cultural definition that caused the Paleo-Muslim Arabs to decide to take their language beyond scripture and the vernacular of the ruling military caste, and make it into the language of imperial administration and culture, as they had earlier with the abandonment of prestige scripts and the use of an Arab script. That the Umayyad ʿAbd al-Malik made this decision cannot legitimately be taken to be self-explanatory, nor does the sanctity of the Arabic Qurʾān itself explain the adoption of Arabic as an imperial language in areas where this language was not spoken. History is replete with instances in which a sacred language is made doubly sacred by limits on its use or is otherwise disengaged from the vernacular; the Umayyads discouraged the teaching of Arabic by Christians.

Much was done to foster the spread of a trans-dialectal Arabic by the principalities of Kinda, B. Naṣr and Āl Jafna, and by the conditions of communication they gave rise to and, of course, by the use of Arabic as the language of court and, possibly, of certain administrative and other purposes.²⁹⁷ Ancient Arabic poetry provides evidence of written treaties,

²⁹⁵ Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 129; 'Arabs', *EQ*.

²⁹⁶ It would not be superfluous to note the existence of a trans-dialectal koine in contemporary Arab Bedouin poetry: Monroe, 'Oral composition', 13.

²⁹⁷ Macdonald ('Reflections', 59) suggests, tentatively, that the court at al-Ḥīra may have been literate in Arabic by the fourth century, writing in Nabataean script, presumably cursive Nabataean. Ferguson ('Arabic koine', 616 f., n. 4, 617, and *passim*), maintaining that Kindite and Hīran origins are still to be demonstrated, proposes a differentiation should be made between the koine that was to develop into Classical Arabic and an unwritten one which lies at the origin of Arabic dialects as they developed. The distance between the two 'did not exceed the usual measure', with diglossia emerging in Arab settlements following the conquests (Blau, 'Beginnings', § 6, 6.3). These arguments require further geographical specifications.

alliances, safe-conducts, testaments and records,²⁹⁸ and Arabic legal phraseology is in evidence from first- and second-century AD papyri from the Nabataean region south of the Dead Sea.²⁹⁹ A bilingual Nessana papyrus dated 687 (a document of release from labour contract) shows Arabic formulae to have been independent of the Greek, corresponding to other Arabic documents of the same age, and betokens documentary templates brought in by the Arabs as they invaded Palestine.³⁰⁰

Based on the confluence of evidence that is dispersed but nevertheless cumulatively compelling, it is clear that the move to write Arabic in Arabic script rather than prestige scripts in the centuries preceding Muḥammad and to allow for it to evolve from late Nabataean Aramaic was in the broad sense a political act and a deliberate choice.³⁰¹ The resulting uniformisation and the development of a specifically Arabic script were concomitant with this, and it may be noted that the earliest Arabic inscriptions found so far are consistent with areas associated with the Jafnids, which may indicate incipient administrative and bureaucratic traditions.³⁰² Let it be mentioned at this point that the diglossia model does not do justice to the complexity of the history of Arabic; there were parallel developments of the spoken and written forms, neither of which can be said to have been the original model, and what is seen as the all-important poetical koine itself developed in parallel with administrative and military Arabic.³⁰³

The earliest indisputably Old Arabic document to survive is the inscription of 'Jl bn Hf'm (*'Jl b. Haf'am/*'Jl b. Hūf'am) at Qaryat al-Fāw, written in Sabaic *musnad* monumental script and dating from the end of the first century BC.³⁰⁴ Also used at Qaryat al-Fāw were Sabaic, Minaic

²⁹⁸ Al-Jahiz, *Ḥayawān*, 1.69 f.

²⁹⁹ Rabin, 'Beginnings', 27, 31; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 242; 'Epigraphy', 57.

³⁰⁰ Khan, 'Pre-Islamic background', 204, 206.

³⁰¹ Cf. Hoyland, *Arabia*, 242; Macdonald, 'Reflections', 58.

³⁰² Fisher, *Between Empires*, 148; Hoyland, 'Arab kings', 131 f.

³⁰³ Blau, 'Beginnings', §§ 3.5, 5.1, 6; Larcher, 'Moyen arabe'; Wagner, *Grundzüge*, 41 f.

³⁰⁴ Macdonald, 'Reflections', 50, and see Robin, 'Inscriptions', 545 ff. The inscription is well reproduced in *Routes d'Arabie*, no. 130. Throughout, I am adopting the categorisation of Arabic languages into Ancient North Arabian (henceforth ANA: Safaitic, Thamūdīc, Dedanitic, Hasaitic, and varieties of Oasis North Arabian used in 'Taymā' and Dūmat al-Jandal), and Arabic (Old Arabic, Middle Arabic and Classical Arabic): Macdonald, 'Ancient North Arabian', 490; 'Reflections', 28 ff.; 'Old Arabic', *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, 470 ff. This is a more exact classification than vaguer ones in terms of Arabic and Proto-Arabic or North Arabian Epigraphic Arabic. ANA and Arabic share many phonological features, and an overlapping onomasticon (without complete overlap). The distinguishing features seem to be the definite article, *al-* in the case of Arabic and *h-* or *hn-* in ANA (Macdonald, 'Ancient north Arabian', 517 ff; Rabin, 'Beginnings', 34). The earliest attested occurrence of the *hn-* in ANA comes from a fifth-century BC Aramaic inscription at Tall al-Mashūṭa in the Nile Delta dedicating a silver bowl to *hn 'lt* (Macdonald, 'Reflections', 41, 41 n. 85), which may indicate a historical-linguistic and geographical context which is little understood.

and, to a minor extent, Nabataean and Thamūdīc scripts and languages. Later, the Nabataean script was used to write Arabic, most famously in the Namāra funerary inscription of Imru' al-Qays, dated 328. In all cases, we have inscriptions in a language that is recognisably Arabic, using the definite article *al-*, in addition to some other features.³⁰⁵ There is also epigraphic evidence for Arabic, written in Nabataean script, antedating the Namāra inscription. It has been maintained that one inscription could be dated to 267,³⁰⁶ and that two lines of poetry in what has been estimated by Bellamy controversially to have been recognisably classical Arabic metrical form in an inscription from the Negev dated before AD 150, possibly as early as AD 6–9.³⁰⁷

More assuredly, it does seem that some Arabic poetry in the classical modes, available in literary sources, could be dated to the third century.³⁰⁸ In addition to lines of poetry discussed by Bellamy, one might mention distantly but pertinently a hymn of supplication for rain in a somewhat indeterminate or hybrid South Arabian language – possibly spoken Ḥimyarite of the first century AD – discovered recently, that uses an ending monorhyme (*qāfiya*), a regular diction and a scannable structure.³⁰⁹ This would place standard poetic diction in the context of developments, discussed above, related to cross-Arabian connections, correlatively providing a sketch of its conditions of emergence in terms of the development of a koine. It would be unreasonable to place the emergence of poetry in such elaborate metrical and motifemic form, structure and verbal variants, not to

On the hypothetical development of the Arabic definite article from the demonstrative particles *hā* or *hal*, see the discussion of Voigt, 'Artikel', 229 ff., who also reviews material and scholarship overall. The history of the *l* is a difficult theme on which there has been much work. It is possibly correlated to the weakening of the **h*, and performed both an article function and an asseverative function. Even in classical Arabic, the *l* as an affirmation of nominals designating the definite form in a nominal sentence was more a tendency than an absolute rule: Testen, *Parallels*, 55 ff., 135 ff., 142 ff., 181. The suggestion, based on one epigraphic testimony, that the *al-* dated from the third century BC has been negated by Macdonald, 'Decline', 21 n. 22.

³⁰⁵ Robin, 'Plus anciens monuments', 116 f.; Robin, 'Inscriptions', 545, 548. Of these additional features, the primary ones are the use of the perfect *muḍāri'* tense in the form *af'ala*, the formation of third person pronouns by /*hl*/ (*huwa*, *humma*, *hiya*, *hum*, *hunna*), and the existence of only two sibilants, the /*s*/ and the /*š*/. The most complete description of the distinguishing features of Arabic is by Ba'albakī, 'Huwiyya', 31 ff. and *passim*.

³⁰⁶ Healey and Smith, 'Jaussen-Savignac 17', 79 ff., 82, who adjudge the Aramaic and Nabataean elements in this inscription to be insufficient to show that the text is Aramaic. This seems to beg the socio-linguistic and historical-linguistic question of connections between Arabic and Nabataean, beyond 'Arabisms' in the one and 'Aramaicisms' in the other.

³⁰⁷ Bellamy, 'Arabic verses', 73, 78 f. – see the sceptical comments of Beeston, 'Arabic verse', and Ambros, 'Zur Inschrift', 90, 92.

³⁰⁸ Furayjāt, *al-Shu'arā'*, ch. 3 and *passim*; Jamāl, 'Umr al-shi'r', 306 and 293 ff.

³⁰⁹ 'Abd Allāh, *Tadwin*, 21 f., 26 – text at 27 ff.; Macdonald, 'Epigraphy and ethnicity', 181; 'Reflections', 30 f.

speak of its volume, as a sudden irruption *ex nihilo* in the sixth century; Renan recognised the problem, and maintained enthusiastically that Arabic poetry had simply had no archaic condition.³¹⁰ The point has been made that Arabic poetry, with case and modal inflections, may have been driven by prosodic rather than syntactical imperatives, and that it represents a form asymmetrical with the uninflected Arabic in use, written as it was spoken with a syntactic structure (topic/comment) that rendered final case inflections redundant. If this is accepted, one would then agree that what was to become classical Arabic was a classicisation in terms of this Old Arabic correlative with the developments of later times.³¹¹

All these considerations lead one to assume the existence of levels of linguistic homogeneity operative in demotic, public and official uses of Arabic, with the centuries immediately preceding Muḥammad indicating features of linguistic homogeneity across a very wide geographical expanse, from Qaryat al-Fāw to northern Syria, both before and after the use of Arabic script.³¹² This spread of the vehicular koine, of a sociolect becoming an ethnolect, is reflected in Arabic inscriptions in southern Syria written in the Greek alphabet, which display a vowel system and some morphological features identifiable in classical Arabic grammar.³¹³ Arabic names with *al-* occur in Karshūnī – Arabic in Syriac letters – at Ṣāḍad, north-east of Damascus, in Christian inscriptions.³¹⁴ That an increasingly standard Arabic was used in north and central Arabia, and in the Fertile Crescent as well, from the third or fourth centuries has been attributed to the decline of Palmyra, where Aramaic was used as an epigraphic language. It was also, and perhaps more saliently, ascribed to the ascendancy of the Naṣrid al-Ḥīra,³¹⁵ who had already inscribed at least one monument, at Umm al-Jimāl in today's Jordan, in a transitional Nabataean–Arabic script.³¹⁶

Yet some use of ANA inscriptions did survive alongside this development, especially in areas to the north of Ḥijāz which had a weak and only a relatively late connection with poetic output.³¹⁷ These territories do not, nevertheless, seem to have been linguistically homogeneous, and were enfolded into territories where Arabic came to use *al-* as a definite article (central and north-eastern Arabia). Territories where Nabataean continued in use had their point of demarcation at Taymā', with Madā'in Ṣāliḥ, a

³¹⁰ Renan, *Histoire générale*, 342, describing it (at 341) as poetry 'barbare sur le fond, et pour la forme d'un extrême délicatesse'.

³¹¹ Larcher, 'In search', 107, 109 and *passim*.

³¹² Beeston, 'Languages', 183.

³¹³ Westenholz, 'Note', 393 ff.

³¹⁴ Littmann, *Syriac Inscriptions*, nos. 65.2, 65.8, 65.13, 65.23, 65.24.

³¹⁵ Dussaud, *Pénétration*, 63 f.

³¹⁶ Littmann, *Nabatean Inscriptions*, no. 41.

³¹⁷ Rabin, 'Beginnings', 34.

short distance to the south-west, being a Nabataean enclave within this linguistic territory.³¹⁸ Two interpenetrating linguistic groups therefore seem to have coexisted as the use of ANA alphabets declined after the third century,³¹⁹ at a time that saw the expansion of a language that was to become classical Arabic. Perhaps correlatively, one needs to study another possible index, that of the use of the Arabic *bn* rather than the Aramaic *br* as the patronymic indicator, a feature which pre-dates the time we are discussing and occurs commonly in Safaitic inscriptions.³²⁰ In all cases, it does seem that the use of what is recognisably Arabic is probably related to migrations of Arabs of southern origin to the north, particularly Kinda, making their dialect dominant by virtue of political success, and leading correlatively to the near-obliteration of genealogies pertaining to al-ʿArab al-ʿĀriba recorded in ANA inscriptions.³²¹

The linguistic map presents us with loose threads, a chequered map of dialectal islets and isolated remnants of migrations.³²² Old Arabic, the basis of the koine, may have been spoken not only in regions described, but in the region of Madāʾin Šālīḥ as well.³²³ The koine possessed features which were distinct from the dialectal features of the regions where it was cultivated – the Euphrates region up to al-Anbār, territories of Tamīm in eastern and central Arabia, and parts of central Arabia bordering on the Ḥijāz. It is a language distinct from epigraphic Arabic which had strong connections with North-West Semitic and Ethiosemitic,³²⁴ and also from the dialects mentioned by later Arab philologists.³²⁵

Be that as it may, the writing of Arabic in metropolitan prestige scripts – Sabaic, Nabataean, Greek or Aramaic – persisted until Arab political formations were becoming durable structures, following the withdrawal of Roman garrisons. Significantly, the shift from Aramaic to Arabic script seems to have occurred on parchment before it did on monuments, implying its use in Jafnid territories,³²⁶ for documents and administrative records, one would assume. Earlier, ANA writing, by all accounts entirely epigraphic and for the most part graffiti, and spoken until the late fifth or early sixth

³¹⁸ Winnett and Reed, *Ancient Records*, 88 f., 131 f.; Moritz, *Sinaitikult*, 42 f.

³¹⁹ Macdonald, 'Decline', 17. See the linguistic typology suggested by Beeston, 'Languages', 184 f., based on the distribution of definite articles.

³²⁰ Harding, *Index*, 118 ff. This is suggested despite the institutional habit of the reading of *br* rather than *bn* in the Arabic inscription of al-Namāra, written in the Nabataean script. Epigraphists have had the habit of regarding *br* as the default reading, as in the inscriptions at Ḥarrān, Zabad and Jabal Usays – see the critical comments of Robin, 'Réforme', 331 f. (Zabad inscription at 337), and Robin and Gorea, 'Réexamen', 508.

³²¹ Hoyland, 'Arab kings', 384, 386 f., 391. ³²² Rabin, 'Beginnings', 29, 35.

³²³ Macdonald, 'Burial', 298. ³²⁴ Ba'albakī ('Huwiyya', 13 ff.) takes this up in detail.

³²⁵ Wagner, *Grundzüge*, 34. ³²⁶ Hoyland, 'Mount Nebo', 35.

century, was used by societies that were, for all practical purposes, illiterate, who would have otherwise projected themselves outwards using scripts of prestige.³²⁷

The transition to the developing Arabic was clearly deliberate, and a deliberate fostering of Arabic as an emergent literate language rather than just a vernacular. It can be considered as a defining moment for what was later to come, following the waning of the Nabataeans and others, and the formation of Arab principalities. This period also saw linguistic Arabisation farther afield: in Yemen in the sixth century, especially in the language of trade and among the military,³²⁸ and following the influence of Kinda,³²⁹ in Palestine,³³⁰ and, one would expect, in areas where ANA dialects were spoken. Not unnaturally, the earliest monuments of Arabic script came from the more literate territories to the north. In addition to inscriptions already discussed, one might mention the transitional Nabataean–Arab inscription at Allāt's temple in Jabal Ramm of c. 328–350, which shows some long development behind it.³³¹ But most important of all was the inscription at Zabad, on which more will be said later.

One assumption has been that literacy in Arabic stood in a causal nexus with Christianisation.³³² A correlation might well be there. But clearly, the overarching context is that of the creation of principalities that encouraged Arabic and the development of Arabic script. Their Christianity (in the case of the Jafnids), or patronage of Christianity and ultimate Christianisation (in the case of the Naṣrids), would also have caused them not to tamper too much with the epigraphic output of a religion expressed in Greek or Aramaic, the former, at least south of the Euphrates and more particularly south of Ḥimṣ, dominant as the monumental language, in a region that largely spoke Aramaic.³³³

As suggested, the decision to adopt a recognisably Arabic script for inscriptions is itself significant, not least as this was in many respects less

³²⁷ See the discussion, and the comparative material, in Macdonald, 'Literacy', 71 f., 77, 78 n. 105, 86 ff. Dedanitic was the only Ancient North Arabian dialect used in monumental inscriptions, employed by a sedentary society eclipsed in the first century AD, using word divisions, written unidirectionally, with *matres lectionis* (Macdonald, 'Reflections', 36; 'Ancient North Arabian', 492; 'Literacy', 79 f., 80 n. 98). Indirect 'practical use' of ANA and other forms of Arabic will be taken up below.

³²⁸ Piotrovskii, *al-Yaman*, 131.

³²⁹ Shahid, 'Authenticity', 6 ff. and *passim*.

³³⁰ Griffith, 'Aramaic to Arabic', 21.

³³¹ Grohmann, *Paläographie*, 2.15. See now, far more fully, Hoyland, 'Mount Nebo'.

³³² Sachau, 'Arabische Inschrift', 188. The role of clerics in the spread of Arabic script is highlighted by Robin, 'Réforme', 326 ff.

³³³ Gatier, 'Inscriptions', 146; Millar, *Roman Near East*, 504, 521; 'Paul of Samosata', 5 ff.

suitable for conveying Arab phonetics than ANA scripts available,³³⁴ or South Arabian *musnad*.³³⁵ What this betokened might be termed a declaration of epigraphic independence, the parties declaring this independence reclaiming an endogenous linguistic self-sufficiency correlative with other fields, including that of official documents. This also marked independence of written languages which, though not Arabic, included syntactical Arabisms and a heavy Arabic lexical influence, without corresponding morphological intrusions that suggested that these languages, such as Aramaic, were not native to the scribes. The prestige scripts, it must be remembered, did not replace native ANA scripts functionally. In view of the argument for linguistic homogenisation made above, the chronological gap of about two centuries between the inscription at al-Namāra and those in Arabic script might well be accounted for by the vagaries of time, including the wide use of spolia,³³⁶ and one may expect that further archaeological finds will, with time, close the gap.

Whatever the mechanisms, and be the origins of this orthographic development to be found in Nabataean or Aramaic,³³⁷ a provisional picture emerges which awaits further systematic attention from the perspective of social geography. Various schemes of possible articulation across the steppe and desert emerge from linguistic indices, all of which yield lines connecting Nabataea, Zabad, al-Anbār and al-Hīra, further connected with Dūmat al-Jandal and Madā'in Šālīh, possibly leading to the Ḥijāz, where sources report a Meccan script.³³⁸

In sum, territories that contained inscriptions in Arabic (as distinct from these earlier forms of the language) come from Nabataean areas in northern Arabia, the Negev and Syria.³³⁹ Scanning the rough map of Arabic around 500,³⁴⁰ one would note a geographical pattern of distribution – again corresponding largely with the distribution of the definite article – suggesting territories connected by a band along routes of trade, military movements and transhumance very likely to have been set first under the auspices of Kinda, using the koine which had become fairly consistent in the sixth century. Features of this koine are also identifiable alongside, and to the east of, the ancient line of communication from Yemen to the north-east. In this picture, west-central Arabia, the Ḥijāz, remains

³³⁴ Macdonald, 'Reflections', 60.

³³⁵ Robin, 'Ecritures', 128.

³³⁶ Abbott, *North Arabic Script*, 13.

³³⁷ The latter is still argued for by Briquel-Chatonnet, 'De l'Araméen', 138 ff. In general, on the Nabataeanist thesis, Gruendler, *Arabic script*, 1 ff, and the later overview in 'Arabic Script', *EQ*, 137 ff. The transition between Nabataean and Arabic is demonstrated in detail by Nehmé, 'Glimpse'.

³³⁸ See Abbott, *North Arabic script*, 5 ff., 9 f. and the map on p. 3.

³³⁹ Hoyland, 'Epigraphy', 55 f. ³⁴⁰ Robin, 'Inscriptions', 539 ff.; Beeston, 'Languages', 183 ff.

again somewhat indeterminate.³⁴¹ In all, we have the makings of a relative linguistic homogenisation across territories under the influence of Arab principalities.

The Ḥijāz unfurled

It has been suggested that Justinian's economic and strategic policies brought an end to the isolation of Yemen³⁴² and to her independence as well: a world set apart from the Romans and the Sasanians by substantial distances, despite maritime connections across the Red Sea and farther afield, and Ḥimyarite forays into Central Arabia.³⁴³ It might be added that it was much the same conditions that brought about the rise to prominence, and perhaps the very constitution, of a hitherto rather obscure collection of small lineages known to posterity as Quraysh, and the rise of that confluence of arid and rough crags and gorges that was Mecca, where they settled or were constituted as a definable group, probably around 500.³⁴⁴

To the system of inner-Arabian articulation, therefore, the Ḥijāz (represented cartographically and socially with its relevant environment of networks on [Map 2](#)), or more accurately central Ḥijāz, was a relative newcomer, a matter well reflected in an incidence of foreign, imperial religions so scant as to allow us to consider the region as a fiercely conservative polytheistic reservation, persisting until swept away by Paleo-Islam which, on this score alone, could be considered as a movement of acculturation into Late Antiquity. It is not surprising that, for all their commercial connections, the Quraysh were only able to mobilise local groups (Kināna, Ghaṭafān, certain groups from Tihāma) against Muḥammad's polity.³⁴⁵

There is much historical material to sustain this view of Mecca and her environs. This runs counter to the conventional picture of Meccan centrality presented in historical scholarship, building upon the classical Muslim historical tradition, in which much is made of the commercial importance of the city, most notably of the Quraysh to which Muḥammad belonged, and of its axial role in the religious and political life of the Peninsula, in times so indeterminate as to appear perennial. But Mecca was a barren and remote set of mountains and ravines whose location seems to have been excentric to the more natural and better-established routes of north–south and east–west commerce. It does not seem to have

³⁴¹ Beeston, 'Languages', 185. ³⁴² Ju'ayr, *al-Kūfa*, 196; Hatke, *Africans*, 414 f.

³⁴³ Hatke (*Africans*, 413) maintains that Sasanians were hardly aware of Aksumite/Yemenite warfare, Red Sea events impelled by Ethiopian interests.

³⁴⁴ Cf. Sa'id, *al-Nasab*, 105 f.; Noth, 'Früher Islam', 15, 17. ³⁴⁵ Noted by Ju'ayr, *al-Kūfa*, 194.



Map 2 West and central Arabia, c. 600

lain athwart known transit routes,³⁴⁶ the topographically more likely routes would have skirted the settlement and run closer to the eastern edge of the central desert separated from Ḥijāz by rough mountainous terrain, along relatively smoother terrain that would have been more suitable for camel traffic.³⁴⁷ That Mecca may for long have had a sanctuary or that it may have been mentioned by Pliny (as Macoraba) does not in itself necessarily project an importance in respects other than the religious.³⁴⁸ It is not very unusual for sanctuaries to be located in difficult and remote terrain requiring special effort for access (one need think only of Delphi), and commercial importance may well have followed religious importance.

Clearly, for Mecca's sanctuary, if this is what it had indeed been, to acquire significant trans-local importance, the region itself would have needed to be drawn into a broader network of relations and movements. These, as suggested, need to be correlated with the consequences of Justinian's policies and the resultant break of Yemen from its relative isolation, apart from her involvement along the Yemen–east Arabian military and ethnographic axis. Meccan trade seems rather the result than the cause of Mecca's prominence.³⁴⁹ It appears to have fallen into the hands of Quraysh 'by default',³⁵⁰ all of which resulted from the situation of Arabia in the sixth century described above.

Important in this regard was the opening of central Ḥijāz to the south, betokened by the interest of Abraha in this region,³⁵¹ and arising from the indeterminate, shifting and diminishing conditions of imperial control resulting from the problems of Arabian principalities sketched above.³⁵² Perhaps paradoxically, this opening to the south was the route that inducted central and southern Ḥijāz into the regimes of Late Antiquity further north. Rising tariffs exacted by the Sasanians, alliances between Yemen

³⁴⁶ Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 157 ff. This view has been challenged recently, with some considerations from topography (Bukharin, 'Mecca', 121 f.). But the jury is still out.

³⁴⁷ Al-Saud, 'Domestication', 131.

³⁴⁸ This had already been noted by Wellhausen (*Reste*, 91); Yāqūt (*Mu'jam*, 4.616) mentions Ptolemy's *Geography*, along with a number of other names under which the settlement was known to the Arabs. Dostal ('Mecca', 194 n. 1) suggests that the name Macoraba may better correspond to Sabaic *Mukariba, designating a holy place or a temple, while Crone (*Meccan Trade*, 134 ff., 137), conceding that etymologies of Mecca's name may be unsound, considers this to be less relevant than silence about the settlement in late antique Greek and other sources.

³⁴⁹ Thus *contra* Wolf, 'Social organization', 392, representing a view widely held.

³⁵⁰ Heck, 'Arabia without spices', 558.

³⁵¹ Signalled perhaps also by the wider use of Yemeni textiles, now used to cover or otherwise decorate the *qubba* canopies and the Ka'ba, noted by Lammens, 'Culte des betyles', 62. Simon (*Meccan Trade*, 41) suggests the possibility of Yemenite reach over Mecca.

³⁵² Cf. Korotaev, 'Origins of Islam', 250 f.

and Ethiopia,³⁵³ and, later, the disruption of Sasanian commerce with the Ethiopian occupation of Yemen,³⁵⁴ all contributed to an emerging situation which made room for a more distinctive profile of the central Ḥijāz region, now that its boundaries, hitherto buffeted by outside interests and squeezed inward, had become less definite. If we had available systematic work on the social geography of the region, a more elaborate and less sketchy picture would emerge of the unfurling of the Ḥijāz after it had been largely enfolded upon itself.

These conditions were conducive to a form of consolidated territorial integrity responding both to pressures and possibilities, not least the induction of Quraysh into emporium trading activities. All the while, it must be stressed, the orientation of northern Ḥijāz had been quite distinct, more routinely integrated with the life of northern agricultural and trading settlements, many Jewish, like the region of Medina (about 300 km distant from Mecca), and at the outer reaches – but within reach – of Jafnid interests.³⁵⁵

Of the external pressures mentioned, note might be taken of the possibility that, during the third quarter of the sixth century, Medina (Yathrib) and Tihāma may have been in some respects answerable to a Sasanian *marzubān* of the desert, and that the reach of the Naṣrids may have extended to Medina and al-Ṭāʾif,³⁵⁶ in the former under alternating Jewish and pagan lineages.³⁵⁷ This needs to be treated as a fitful rather than a durable regime of control, like the direct influence attributed to Ḥimyarites, a question still open.³⁵⁸ It was with the waning of the influence of al-Ḥira in the 570s, and the furtive unravelling of its control by the Sasanians, that opportunity called, and that the significance of Quraysh, hitherto local, would

³⁵³ The full measure and nature of Arabian connections with Ethiopia (apart from Yemen) is a matter that still awaits research.

³⁵⁴ Heck, 'Arabia without spices', 558 f.

³⁵⁵ The Jafnids are said to have mounted a campaign against Taymā' and Khaybar under al-Ḥārith, and a Jafnid branch was established at Medina (Caskel, *Ḡamhara*, 2.529 ff.), which seems to have been in subordinate alliance with the Jewish clan of Tha'laba b. 'Amr (Serjeant, 'Constitution', 28).

³⁵⁶ Simon, *Meccan Trade*, 332 f.; Lecker, 'Taxes', 112 f., 115, 123. Kister ('Al-Ḥira', 145, 146 ff.) affirms that this *marzubān* set up the Jewish tribes of B. al-Naḍir and B. Qurayza of Medina over the polytheistic al-Aws and al-Khazraj, and considers questions of plausibility. Whether it was control or ambition, Sasanian imperial interest was well expressed in a Middle Persian geographical work of the sixth or seventh century which incorporated Mecca and Medina into Ērānshahr (Daryaei, 'Changing image', 104).

³⁵⁷ Lecker, 'Taxes', 110 f., 123. One result of this was the cementing of an alliance between the Aws, temporarily driven out of Yathrib to Mecca, and the Quraysh (Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Munammaq*, 271), a matter that had some consequence for problems faced by Muḥammad at Medina.

³⁵⁸ Robin, 'Ḥimyar et Israël', 870.

have gained energy and significance.³⁵⁹ It was also during this period that Quraysh can be seen as having become party to a treaty arrangement called the *Īlāf* guaranteeing safe passage for the famed annual Two Journeys, of summer and winter,³⁶⁰ a term that needs to be seen as shorthand for the seasonal rhythms of trade rather than taken literally.

Details are uncertain, but commercial involvement cannot be doubted.³⁶¹ The *Īlāf* of Quraysh had a close connection with the crystallisation of Quraysh³⁶² as a settled clan group, internally differentiated, with territorial claims sufficient for it to establish protected and sacred ground indicated by the so-called *mawāqīt*, boundaries at which, in appropriate seasons, visitors needed to come into a state of ritual purity (*iḥrām*).³⁶³ It involved Qurayshi traders acquiring charters of safe passage from tribal leaders and from rulers in outlying regions as well, pacts of security, and a system of payments and the distribution of shares among various parties concerned.³⁶⁴

This required, of course, some form of authority operative locally, and all indications are that the constitution of Quraysh, and within Quraysh the dominance of B. ‘Abd Shams (and within those of B. Umayya b. Ḥarb), involved a considerable amount of internal conflict. This position of primacy had been reached after the settlement had been dominated, successively, by B. Hāshim (to whom Muḥammad belonged) followed by an interregnum under B. Makhzūm.³⁶⁵ It was also expressed in internal factional alliances among the Quraysh al-Biṭāḥ that have already been mentioned – between al-Muṭayyibūn (‘Abd Shams, with Asad, Zuhra, Taym Allāt, al-Hārith b. Fihir) and al-Aḥlāf (‘Abd al-Dār, with Makhzūm, Sahm, Jumḥ, ‘Adī), later Ḥilf al-Fuḍūl (c. 605), most likely a continuation of al-Muṭayyibūn.³⁶⁶ These alliances seem to have yielded a reconfiguration

³⁵⁹ Cf. Rothstein, *Lahmiden*, 116 f.; Ju‘ayṭ, *Sīra*, 2.130 ff.; Kister, ‘Mecca and Tamim’, 113 f.

³⁶⁰ See Reinert, *Recht*, 21 f.

³⁶¹ Crone (‘Quraysh’, 77) now concurs to the genuineness and importance of this institution. The sources speak of a variety of possible destinations, including Yemen, Syria and Ethiopia (usefully tabulated by Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 205 f.) – see also WAQ, 197; al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, § 971; Rubin, ‘Īlāf’, 170 ff. Simon (*Meccan Trade*, 64 ff.) attempts a chronology.

³⁶² Cf. Sa‘īd, *al-Nasab*, 104 ff., 165.

³⁶³ I would agree with the relatively late date for this arrangement (Simon, *Meccan Trade*, 69 ff.) rather than the earlier assumption of Ju‘ayṭ, *Sīra*, 2.129 ff. Establishing an absolute chronology is not possible, and the matter needs to rest on external indices and external developments.

³⁶⁴ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 162 f.; Birkeland, *Lord*, 106 f.; Kister, ‘Mecca and Tamim’, 117 ff.

³⁶⁵ See the overview in Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 32.

³⁶⁶ See, among others, Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 167 f. The sources are more silent than one would expect about Hāshim b. ‘Abd Manāf. No information is available concerning any marriages he may have contracted with the clans that composed Quraysh; his relations seem to have been largely in Medina (including Muḥammad’s great-great-grandmother Salmā bint ‘Amr, of the Khazrajite

of internal relations from one in which Makhzūm had belonged together with ‘Abd Shams to a group opposed by ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib b. Hāshim.³⁶⁷ It will be remembered that this association of B. ‘Abd Shams and Makhzūm was to be succeeded by the two parties belonging to opposing sides of the Muṭayyibūn/Ahlāf divide.

This followed their establishment in Mecca, under the generic name of Fihir,³⁶⁸ accompanied by alliances with Kināna (especially the Aḥābīsh)³⁶⁹ and Quḍā’a, and by their ejection, subordination and absorption of the local population, known to the sources by the name Khuza’a and B. Bakr, who had in their turn displaced the obscure Jurhum.³⁷⁰ Clearly, the picture emerging is one of rapid change and of rapid shifts in alliances. In all cases, and whoever may have been dominant, the communal affairs of Mecca seem to have been negotiated by a ‘genealogical-plutocratic’³⁷¹ oligarchic assembly (*al-mala’*) meeting in Dār al-Nadwa where, among other things, local rites of passage were performed.³⁷²

B. al-Najjār/Taym Allāt) and in Syria, underlining a division between central and southern Hijāz on the one hand, and its northern part where Muḥammad built up his authority initially, on the other, and one can speak of course for other kinds of division within Quraysh (Sa’īd, *al-Nasab, passim*, esp. 78 ff. 116 ff., 129 ff., 442, 521 ff.). As suggested, the origins of Quraysh, probably from the region west of Mecca, are obscure; their constitution as a clan occurred c. 500, when they acquired their name, following a period of leadership under Quṣayy b. Kilāb, often referred to by the hypocoristic *al-mujammi’* (the Gatherer), a possibly legendary figure, who bequeathed to the Umayyads his war standard called al-‘Uqāb (the falcon) – see TAB, 310, 313; Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1.51, 53; *SH*, 1.15, 27; *AGH*, 22.43. One way to investigate the formation of Quraysh may be through studying the names of Quṣayy’s wives as they occur in the sources, names that are at first sight quite unusual given the standard Arab onomasticon, and the names of their fathers (TAB, 312 f.).

³⁶⁷ Watt (*Muhammad at Mecca*, 14) proposed that Abraha’s interest in Mecca may have been invited by local differences, in the course of which ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib sought Yemeni support against the B. ‘Abd Shams, Makhzūm and Nawfal.

³⁶⁸ For genealogies of Quraysh, see al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, 2.352 ff. and Caskel, *Ġamhara*, 1.128, table 4.

³⁶⁹ It is sometimes assumed that these were a community of Ethiopian stock, clients of the Kināna. But here – as in other cases – the ‘seductive pastime’ of etymology does not seem to be of much help, and it is difficult to determine whether this was an appellative or a gentilic derived from Jabal Hubshī where an agreement of *jiwār* was concluded between them and the Quraysh. See Wansbrough, ‘Gentilics’, 203, 206, 210.

³⁷⁰ TAB, 310 ff.; al-Fāsi, *Shifā’*, 1.363 ff., 2.48 ff. ³⁷¹ Rotter, *Umayyaden*, 248.

³⁷² One such was the social confirmation of puberty, called *tadrī’*, whereby the maiden’s cloak, the *dir’*, was ‘split’ (*shuqq’ alayhā*). This splitting may indicate that a *dir’* was tailored, implying that such a garment was adopted at puberty to cover the maiden’s hitherto bare chest; before this she would have worn a loin-cloth. Following the ceremony, the pubescent girl, and one would assume this applied to the noble lineages, was then consigned by her folk to a regime of modest dress and perhaps also of movement (*ḥajabūhā*). One superintendent of this rite was identified as a member of B. ‘Abd Manāf, and a certain ‘Amir b. Hāshim b. ‘Abd Manāf was known as a *muhayyid*, a certifier of menstruation (al-Azraqī, *Akbbār Makka*, 66; Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1.52). For *dir’*; see *LA*, s.v.; Jacob, *Beduienenleben*, 45; Dozy, *Dictionnaire*, 176 f. It is interesting to note a famous Palmyrene bas-relief, and other evidence indicating that covering the heads of women may have been common; the bas-relief in question illustrates a ritual religious context (de Vaux, ‘Sur

This internal establishment of dominion was consolidated by dominance in the immediate vicinity, accomplished by the four-year war of al-Fijār, a very chequered affair, in which Muḥammad is reported to have participated as a boy or a young man. This war confirmed the primacy of Quraysh over central and southern Ḥijāz, having subdued or at least neutralised Thaqīf, masters of al-Ṭāʾif who had taken the side of Abraha in the course of his northern campaign. This relative dominance took the usual form of an alliance which inducted Thaqīf into the Meccan cultic association (the Ḥums), and led to the unusual marriage of women from the endogamous Quraysh into Thaqīf. It also enabled Quraysh to purchase land in Wajj, controlled by Thaqīf, and involved both in common commercial and in military activities.³⁷³ This alliance had been preceded by inner-Meccan struggles, in all probability over cultic prerogatives and its attendant authority and wealth, the two major factions being the Aḥlāf and the Muṭayyibūn, who finally seem to have reached a compromise.³⁷⁴

It seems to be the case that these events crystallised following the opening of central Ḥijāz as Abraha prosecuted his military campaigns north and north-east.³⁷⁵ Although the historicity of reports concerning the two campaigns of Abraha against central Ḥijāz has been doubted,³⁷⁶ we have seen that campaigns did take place in the vicinity, although his alleged attempt to impose Christianity upon the Meccan region or his definitive control over Mecca and al-Ṭāʾif is dubious.³⁷⁷ Whatever the truth of the matter, into the chaotic situation which allowed the unfurling of central Ḥijāz needs to be factored the Persian intervention in Yemen in the years following 570.

Belonging to the same international geo-strategic context was the attempt by the Meccan ʿUthmān b. al-Ḥuwayrith b. Asad b. ʿAbd al-ʿUzzā b. Quṣayy, apparently a Christian, to persuade the Jafnids or Constantinople (or both, in tandem) to set him up as king over Mecca. This affair seems to have been related to differences within Quraysh, including a section of his own B. Asad, and to a certain unclear challenge that ʿUthmān posed to Quraysh interests in Syria, as a result of which he is reported to have

la voile', *passim*). It would not be unreasonable to conjecture that other rites of passage, such as the naming of infants to be discussed below, may also have taken place in a similar or in the same setting. This could also be said of the circumcision of pubescent males, if that was indeed the time at which circumcision was performed, or younger ones. On rites of passage, see Bell, *Ritual*, 94 ff.

³⁷³ Ibn Ḥabīb, *Munammaq*, 280 f.; Kister, 'Mecca and Tamīm', 157 ff. ³⁷⁴ *SIH*, 1.121 f., 125 ff.

³⁷⁵ On this correlation, see the comments of Heck, 'Arabia without spices', 559, and Kister, 'Some reports', 75 f.

³⁷⁶ Simon (*Meccan Trade*, 337, 337 nn. 59, 60) confined Abraha's interests to the north-east.

³⁷⁷ Smith, 'Events', 434, 463.

been poisoned at their instigation while there.³⁷⁸ Details are obscure and inconstant, but the outcome is clear, and there is little reason to doubt the veracity of this report in its bare essentials, which are indicative of a possible attempt by the Romans to gain a foothold in Arabia following direct Sasanian presence in Yemen.³⁷⁹

In all events, the combination of local dominance and the growth of the legend that the gods had protected Mecca from Abrahā's armies established a position for Quraysh both military (albeit based on alliances, as Quraysh themselves were neither numerous nor particularly martial) and diplomatic, placed under divine protection and proceeding peaceably through a network of alliances both cultic and commercial,³⁸⁰ and all the while deploying the *ḥilm* (sagacity, discernment, acuity, soundness) constantly ascribed to them in the sources, probably as a shorthand for their canny organisational and diplomatic abilities. The Quraysh were *laqāḥ*, like the B. Ḥanifa of al-Yamāma, lineages without great numbers and military prowess but nevertheless independent and not liable to exactions.³⁸¹ Quraysh traders were probably held to be inviolate while frequenting the proximate markets of 'Ukāz, Dhū l-Majāz and Mijanna, attended consecutively for obscure reasons possibly related to social topography and the micro-configuration of alliances and to what might be described as the desert equivalent of cabotage trade, in a state of *iḥrām*.³⁸² This serves to underline a very special position, a token of inviolability they carried with them – a special term, *basl* (pl. *busul*), designated a person claiming inviolability, as we have seen.³⁸³ This inviolability was clearly recognised as reaching beyond their own sacred domains, where they were able to exact a levy on materials brought in for small-time trading, and portions of animals sacrificed,³⁸⁴ the latter possibly to be considered as heave offerings.

Quraysh thus moved from a local commercial role peripheral to trans-local ones to a greater reach in the context, first, of the treaty of 560 and,

³⁷⁸ US, no. 7; Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Munammaq*, 42; Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamhara*, 52; al-Fāṣī, *Shifā'*, 2.108 f.; Ibn Hajar, *al-Iṣāba*, 3.97; Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 15.

³⁷⁹ The chronology is uncertain: Restle, 'Hauran', 966; Nagel, *Mohammed*, 77 and 74 ff.

³⁸⁰ See Rubin, 'Ilāf', 168 ff., 179. Crone (*Meccan Trade*, 181 ff.) finds the holiness attaching to Quraysh in the sources to be not implausible, but nevertheless unlikely.

³⁸¹ 'L-q-h', LA; Kister, 'Struggle', 23.

³⁸² Ibn Ḥabīb, *Munammaq*, 196, 275; al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 132; al-Marzūqī, *Azmina*, 164 ff. (for the sequence). One might also mention the possible existence of another, minor fair, at Badr (WAQ, 387).

³⁸³ AGH, 19.16. *Basl* in classical Arabic has an interesting and polyvalent semantic field, belonging to the class of *addād*, homonymous opposites, and can indicate both sacral inviolability and profanity – 'b-s-l', LA.

³⁸⁴ A special term (*ḥarīm*) referred to these portions: Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishtiqāq*, 1.90.

later, of the chaos that followed turbulence in Yemen and the breakdown of the system overseen by the northern principalities of the Jafnids and the Naṣrids.³⁸⁵ They moved into emporium trading, using local goods and supplying local needs in an apparently ever expanding circle, from Syria (including Gaza) to Yemen,³⁸⁶ an arrangement which persisted until the conquest of Mecca by Muḥammad in 630.³⁸⁷ Quraysh not only prospered at 'Ukāz, but also frequented the distant market of Rābiyat Ḥaḍramawt, an emporium which made available commodities not found elsewhere, such as swords, saddles and horses.³⁸⁸ That this market took place at the same time as 'Ukāz bespeaks an elaborate differentiation in Meccan commercial dealings. It is indeed time to re-examine the conventional interpretations of the slight measure of Meccan trade, and assumptions of the lack of trading and transactions in precious metals, an interpretation that had overshot as scholars sought to challenge untenable assumptions about the spice trade.³⁸⁹ Mining, gold and silver have already been mentioned, and it is eloquent testimony to their salience that Muḥammad bestowed mining franchises, or possibly grants, *qatā'i'*, to some of his followers, 20 per cent of whose revenue was allocated to the public purse at Medina.³⁹⁰ A suggestion has been made recently for the export of wine from the al-Ṭā'if region to India.³⁹¹

The claim that it made little sense for the Meccans to trade in humble commodities of low unit value (hides, agricultural produce, some textiles, wool) in and out of the Ḥijāz³⁹² can be countered by an argument from standard economic theory which brings in differentials of price, demand and quality, not to speak of the demands of the pilgrimage season, and other relevant factors.³⁹³ Crone has recently made the point that, at the time when she questioned the importance of trade to Mecca a quarter of a century ago, it was not well appreciated how colossal the demand by Roman and Sasanian armies for leather in fact was, and that on this score alone

³⁸⁵ Ju'ayṭ, *Sīra*, 2.130 ff. ³⁸⁶ Heck, 'Arabia without spices', 560.

³⁸⁷ Ju'ayṭ, *Sīra*, 2.129. ³⁸⁸ Al-Marzūqī, *Azmina*, 165.

³⁸⁹ Heck, 'Gold mining', 389 – the Yemeni spice trade did in fact become wholly maritime by the first century AD, and the Roman market collapsed in the third century, never to recover (Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 17 ff., 99 ff. and chs. 1 and 3, *passim*). The conventional view of the local nature of Meccan trade – oddly enough, not excluding the possibility that Quraysh dominated the distribution of Syrian and Egyptian goods in Arabian markets – is well represented by Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 114, 153, 157.

³⁹⁰ Heck, 'Gold mining', 372. ³⁹¹ Bukharin, 'Mecca', 129 f.

³⁹² See the comments of Wansbrough, review of Crone, *Meccan Trade*.

³⁹³ Heck, 'Arabia without spices', 553, 558, 563, 572 f.

trade needs to be reinstated as a major factor in the history of Quraysh.³⁹⁴ That terms related to the marketplace were used metaphorically in the Qurʾān some 370 times, distributed more or less evenly across the text, and that the text includes a vocabulary of reckoning by weights and measures and of the account-book,³⁹⁵ speaks volumes for a lively commercial ethos. Further, that the cream of Quraysh had, by the time of Muḥammad's divine commission, durable relations with outlying territories is signalled by land holdings in southern Syria and a commercial presence there,³⁹⁶ and by indications of the possible use by the Qurayshi aristocracy of the Roman postal system.³⁹⁷

We shall see how the unfurling of the *Ḥijāz* repeated, in much broader compass and greater historical consequence, the earlier politics of Kinda, Jafna and Naṣr. Like these earlier polities, the *Ḥijāz* under Quraysh, and particularly the Umayyads of B. ʿAbd Shams after a brief Medinan interregnum, carried forth a familiar form of polity among the Arabs and transposed it from the local to the universal, once Syria had been subdued. It must be said, however, that, like the Kinda, Jafna and Naṣr, the horizons of expectation and ambition of the Arabs of the *Ḥijāz* are unlikely to have aspired to imperial rule;³⁹⁸ unlike the Germanic peoples in relation to Rome, they did not migrate into imperial territory, and remained external players. However, once the imperial road was opened, and ambitions fortified, they garnered the elements discussed above: experience of states and empires, skills of negotiation and command, a language increasingly homogeneous and other elements of an ethnogenetic consciousness, and the opportunities afforded by the relative disorientation and uncertainty of empires to the north. In addition, they carried one other element that facilitated their replacement of their imperial predecessors, namely, a scripturalist religion conjugated with a state structure.

³⁹⁴ Crone, 'Quraysh', 65, 86, 88. She is sceptical about the importance of gold, but wisely considers the points brought about by Heck to be worthy of serious consideration.

³⁹⁵ Torrey, *Commercial-Theological Terms*, 3 f., 46 f., 9 ff. and *passim*, summarised with some supplementation in 'Trade and commerce', *EQ*.

³⁹⁶ Simon, *Meccan Trade*, 92 ff.; de Prémare, *Taʾrīḥ*, 87 ff. ʿUmar I and others are said to have made their fortunes in Gaza (Crone, 'Quraysh', 80, 80 n. 89).

³⁹⁷ Silverstein, *Postal Systems*, 47 f.

³⁹⁸ Cf. the remarks of Saʿīd, *al-Nasab*, 78 f., on the lack of a historical horizon on the part of Quraysh that might have completed and complemented the *ilāf* arrangement.

CHAPTER 4

Preface to Allāh

The previous chapters took a view with broad geographical and temporal parameters in order to describe a number of features and trends that constituted what, it will be maintained, was the setting for religious developments out of which Paleo-Islam emerged eventually. Two primary matters were highlighted. The first concerned structural features of polytheistic religion relating to cult and to changes and transformations of cult. The other was the primacy of a particular deity thus emerging, eventually given œcumenical force by the adoption of Christianity by empire. The former matter will be seen to connect Paleo-Islam with the earlier history of religion generically by highlighting structural congruences. The latter accounts for lineal historical descent. Both form part of the generic prehistory of another major deity, Allāh, yet to emerge.

Overall, the present chapter will describe, first, the conditions of religious life prevalent among the Arabs before Muḥammad, with a view to sketching the situation, at the point of application, out of which the Paleo-Muslim deity emerged. It will then go on to describe ambient conditions of monolatry and monotheism which contributed to the elaboration of the new religion. The following chapters will then propose ways in which these initial conditions were recycled and refashioned to generate an altogether revolutionary religious transformation that, once connected with the œcumenical conditions surrounding Arabia, charted eventually a development that came to be called Islam.

Lineaments of Arab religion

It seems that religions in late antique Arabia preserved intact some of the most elementary forms of polytheism, despite forms of Christianity among Arabs of the Fertile Crescent, the long-standing presence of Jews in Medina and areas further north, and a fitful history of Christianity and Judaism in Yemen.

The pattern of polytheistic divinities worshipped was dizzyingly kaleidoscopic. The image conveyed by the sources, exemplified by the work of Ibn al-Kalbī, is one of extreme fragmentation.¹ Older scholarship, perhaps best exemplified by Wellhausen, had already spoken of the 'chaff of divine names' in a book dedicated to Theodor Nöldeke. Nöldeke agreed.² Scholars have often spoken of the difficulties of interpreting Arabian religions, even with respect to the far better documented divinities of south Arabia.³ With regard to these divinities, it has been pointed out that our knowledge suffers still from the absence of source material and synthetic studies that would indicate the specific 'nature' of divinities, their zones of diffusion, the constituencies of their worshippers and their evolution over time.⁴ Other scholars have thought it appropriate, unhelpfully, to seek out the 'essence' or the 'original identity' of Allāt and al-'Uzzā.⁵

Synthetic and analytical studies, and attempted studies, are rare. Overall, whereas one might quite legitimately hold that older scholarship on this topic was marked by an over-interpretation in terms of schemata deriving from the history of religions, most recent work may be characterised by a reticence to attempt interpretations in terms that go beyond the limited scope of empirical material, in this case archaeological and epigraphic material. The search for origins and for the specific 'nature' of particular deities, in conceptual, theological origins lodged in theophoric names,⁶ or in locations of origin such as Babylonia,⁷ does not help much. This was a situation characterised by a fragmentation which is testimony to the local natures of deities and, indeed, to their all-purpose nature at their points of application, and the lack of functional specialisation among them.⁸

¹ Atallah, *Idoles*, LIII.

² Nöldeke, review of Wellhausen, *Reste*, 712. For a classification of Arab divinities according to name (personal names, toponyms, names derived from natural phenomena including animals, names related to limbs, divinities of clans, ancestral divinities and divinities supposedly ancient): Nöldeke, 'Arabs'.

³ Ryckmans, 'Quelques divinités', 459 ff. See the appendix to this chapter for scholarship on Arab religions.

⁴ Robin, 'Écritures', 140; 'Filles de Dieu', 128. ⁵ Henninger, 'Sternkunde', 100, 102.

⁶ Grimme (*Texte und Untersuchungen*, 147 ff.) concedes (150) nevertheless that Safaitic divinities were not distinguished functionally or conceptually.

⁷ For instance, Ryckmans, 'Quelques divinités', 463 f., 467 f., with reference to South Arabian astral deities, by what he calls the 'method of parallelism'.

⁸ See the criticism of Macdonald ('Goddesses, dancing girls', 4 ff., 27), ascribing the identification of astral and mythical associations to personal names and iconographies to abuse of etymology and philology. One might level the same criticism at attempts to find triads of divinities, pairs of cultic locations or even trinities, in order to give form to a system that obeyed rules other than those of mythographers, priests and modern scholars: for instance, Lammens, 'Culte', 74 f.; Ryckmans, 'Quelques divinités', 462 f.

There has also been the nagging supposition that the archaism of these religions could be regarded as in some way regressive. There has been an implicit and unnecessary assumption that some monotheistic pantocrator lurked above and beyond the plurality of deities among Semitic peoples, explicitly in nineteenth-century scholarship, influenced by Max Müller and exemplified by Wellhausen.⁹ It is, with different nuances, also in accord with late antique, Christian and Muslim conceptions of the history of religion, in which it was supposed that polytheism is a degeneration of a primeval monotheism.¹⁰ Degeneration or not, the lack of analytical studies is often related to our extremely rudimentary knowledge of Arab theology and myth.¹¹

It seems appropriate, therefore, that we shall need to deal with the question of the ‘chaff of divine names’, of recovering the wheat, in terms of two interlocking approaches. The first will map some of these divinities, with special emphasis on those that seem to have arisen to some form of prominence and achieved significance beyond their immediate locality; a definitive and exhaustive mapping, desirable as it certainly is, is not possible at the present state of research. Such a mapping will consider the spectrum of possibilities between autarchy on the one hand, and the rise of centres of religious and political hegemony on the other. At this latter point, polytheism seems to have been aggregatively accumulated in a manner that has been encountered above, doubtless reflecting political alliances, migrations and similar factors – this was an aggregation in the form not only of the syncretism discussed in [chapter 2](#), but of the gathering of a plurality of deities in one sacral location such as Mecca, al-Uqayşir, Manbij/Hierapolis, or Jabal Ithlib in the Ḥijr/Madā’in Ṣāliḥ area, and

⁹ Wellhausen held Protestantism to be the true heir of ancient Israelite religion, before what he saw as its unnatural, inorganic legalistic fetishism by the Pharisees (Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 180 f.). His account of Arab paganism was made in the flow of this sentiment.

¹⁰ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 217; Grimme, *Texte und Untersuchungen*, 139 f.; MbS, 2.232; al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 72; Ibn Saʿīd, *Nashwa*, 1.73, who regarded astral religions as constituting a higher stage than idolatry. Medieval Arabic history of religions is a topic which merits a detailed study. Hawting (*Idolatry*, 61 and chs. 3 and 4) sketches some salient elements of this topic, starting from the Qurʾān, and sees it as an instance of a general monotheistic polemic.

¹¹ Krone, *al-Lāt*, 17 f. The attempts by ʿAjīna (*Asāṭīr*) and al-Ḥūt (*al-Mithūliyyā*) go only so far as to treat this matter in light of later sources. ʿAlwān (*Muʿtaqadāt*, 117 ff.) provides a glossary of ancient Arab beliefs. Concepts of a Semitic Holy Family or of a Near Eastern theological doxa, a motif of Pan-Babylonianism, are tenaciously present as a default gloss and interpretation, and seem contrived and foisted upon the Arabs from other materials, and are unsupported by evidence. See Henninger, ‘Problem der Venusgottheit’, 161. Similarly, the interpretation of Palmyrene divinities and their relations in terms of hypostases and the *logos*, with reference of Philo, Celsus and Plutarch (Seyrig, ‘Antiquités syriennes’, 93, 103 f.), tackles these matters with too much uncritical reliance on literary rationalisation and redaction: Kaizer, ‘Oriental cults’, 42.

the seasonal devotion to different deities by one and the same group of worshippers.

The second approach will aim to identify elements of commonality that might emerge from the perplexing variety that could seem confusing at first sight. It will be seen that these elements are primarily cultic, lending these deities, in effect, properties of Gods of the Moment (*Augenblicksgötter*), specific to the moment and place of worship, even when their worship was repeated regularly and had spread beyond a particular locality. Cultic worship took place at the zero point of elocutionary signification, whereby defining the divine was fully encapsulated in enunciating the divine name or epiclesis, and exhausted at the moment of evocation; this is a feature correlative with communicative formalisation overall.¹² A semantic overlay interpreting the deity or its iconography at the point of application is a phenomenon secondary to cultic practices of supplication, penitence, evocation and propitiation. This will facilitate a consequent consideration of another purpose of the following discussion: the 'nature' of the divine as expressed in whatever taxonomy of the divine may have existed among the Arabs of central and western Arabia in the period preceding the emergence of Allāh.

The scatter of theonyms

Imperial impact on the emergence of trans-local religions represents one end of the spectrum encompassing the spread of cults and the interplay of the local and the general. This phenomenon pre-dates Late Antiquity, of course, and was more a characteristic of the edges rather than at the centre of Arabia. Although, as suggested, the idea of a Near Eastern theological orthodoxy is without foundation, we do nevertheless find evidence of a canonical iconography in areas limitrophic with empire.¹³ Such evidence arises from cities along the arc of the Fertile Crescent, and relates to nodal cities such as Palmyra or agglomerations such as those of the Decapolis.

Some preliminary indications will serve an illustrative purpose. Of these, one might mention the Palmyrene floor mosaic of Cassiopeia, or a floor mosaic of indeterminate provenance, inscribed in Syriac, depicting the creation of man by Prometheus under the supervision of Māralāhā, probably standing for Zeus as an *interpretatio aramaica*, and involving Hermes, Hera and other figures.¹⁴ Palmyrene deities seem to have been

¹² Cf. Bloch, 'Symbols', 78 f.

¹³ Kaizer, 'Oriental cults', 42. For south Arabia, Robin, 'Matériaux', 13.

¹⁴ Drijvers and Healey, *Syriac Inscriptions*, Cm 11.

gathered up iconographically into two groups around two deities, Bel and Baalshamin, both originally gods of settled peoples of the Fertile Crescent. Around them was an assembly of local deities, the pair Aglibōl and Yarhibōl being perhaps the best known, and encompassing a variety of deities who have generally been described as specifically Arab, most importantly in Palmyra Allāt, 'Azīzu and Arṣu.¹⁵ These were depicted according to a variety of iconographic conventions, some of a military protective nature with spear, shield, cuirass and mount, others replete with solar and lunar associations depicted by nimbus and crescent. Yet others were depicted with cosmocratic associations, indicated by an eagle. Finally, iconographic syncretism's classical expression in the region was perhaps that of Allāt–Athena, especially in Palmyra and southern Syria,¹⁶ dramatically illustrated by Figures 2 and 3.

It is the intention here not to return to the profusion of Hellenistic syncretisms discussed above, but simply to consider matters of analytical pertinence for the discussion to follow. The Palmyrene situation represents an accentuated form of syncretism attendant upon empire and, very importantly, upon the geographical and socio-political mobility of traders. What is important to highlight here is that there does not seem to be sufficient reason to impute to this organisation and association of deities a coherent and stable form, most notably the often-invoked notion of a triad,¹⁷ if this triadic association were to be understood as a theological elaboration beyond cultic association and its conditions.

Rather, the interest in looking at this edge of the spectrum resides in the realisation that in Palmyrene syncretism, and one would assume with others as well, worship may have been offered to a variety of deities, separately and individually or together. This is reflected in the elaborate Palmyrene temples, where more than one deity may be worshipped in a temple dedicated to a specific deity such as Bel, and where different cultic structures within it were erected by different groups of local benefactors who came together, or separately, to worship in 'a federal sanctuary',¹⁸ at a

¹⁵ Kaizer, *Religious Life*, 56 f., 79 ff., 105 ff.; Seyrig, 'Antiquités syriennes', 93, 86 ff.; 'Antiquités syriennes', 89, 77–112.

¹⁶ Drijvers, *Religion of Palmyra*, pls. III.1, IV.1, IV.2, xxv ff.; *Moi, Zénobie*, pls. 45, 142, 144, 145, 160, 161, 162 and some other important deities: Hercules (pl. 189), Mithras (pl. 190), Nike/Victory (pls. 1, 41); Février, *Religion*, 68, 71 ff. A similar if less spectacular situation prevailed in Edessa and Dura Europos, and in the Decapolis, on which see Figueras, 'Roman worship'.

¹⁷ Gawlikowski, 'Allat et Baalshamin', 202 f. A claim for triads in Hauran was made by Sourdel, *Cultes*, 120.

¹⁸ Schlumberger, 'Quatres tribus', 128 f.; Kaizer, *Religious Life*, 58 f., 70 f., 79 ff., 105 ff.



Fig. 2 Allāt, from the Allāt temple, Palmyra, second half of the first century BC, now in the Palmyra museum, Inv. B1887.



Fig. 3 Allāt–Athena from the Allāt temple, Palmyra, third century AD, now in the Palmyra Museum.

sacred location animated by a variety of named deities, possibly of various provenances.

Moving on to the other end of the spectrum, and to the region of the steppe and the desert, we find mention of divinities which occur only very locally, and of which nothing remains but the name, such as *Tdy* of Taymā'.¹⁹ One might also mention singular incidences of Isis in the Ḥawrān or the possible occurrence of the name Isidoulos from the tribe of Ruwāḥ in Umm al-Jimāl,²⁰ and Zeus Safathenos at Buṣra, whose worship had been made official under Herod the Great, and who may well have been a syncretised version of Baalshamīn,²¹ worshipped by Safaitic residents of and visitors to the city.

Another case of syncretism might be highlighted with regard to Dhū Sharā A'rā, tutelary god of the Nabataean kings and thus, with them, condemned to virtual disappearance after their state collapsed in AD 106. This deity was, in different locations, associated with Allātum, Manōth, Hubalu, Dionysius, Zeus, Helios and other deities, his relevance to persons outside the royal family being clearly due to his association with other, local deities,²² some of greater range and durability. His presence extended to areas under Nabataean influence or presence outside their domains in southern Syria, including Egypt,²³ in all likelihood due to the presence of Nabataean communities there.

A similar situation arises in the evanescent presence at Qaryat al-Fāw of Hellenistic, Egyptian and Mesopotamian divine iconographies associated with Isis and with the local chieftain Mu'āwiyat b. Ka'b.²⁴ Here there was clearly some importation of idols. Harpocrates with a cornucopia is interesting; of his two statues, one is thought to have been of local manufacture, the other imported, and named *al-Aḥwar.²⁵ Some were perhaps used decoratively, but others seem to have performed other functions. A statuette of a winged youth that may represent Eros has an inscription indicating it was an offering to the god Kahl, and another, similar but far cruder statuette had upon its wings incisions through which talismans or petitions may have been attached.²⁶ Of the statues found at Qaryat

¹⁹ Healey, *Tomb Inscriptions*, H12.9.

²⁰ Sourdel, *Cultes*, 92; Littmann, *Nabataean Inscriptions*, no. 43 (the reading of [I]sidoulos is uncertain).

²¹ Grimme, *Texte*, 135. See also 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 5.143. ²² Healey, *Religion*, 13 f., 81 ff., 97 ff.

²³ Healey, *Religion*, 63 f., 91; *LIMC*, III/1.670 ff. The Nabataeans also seem to have had cults instituted for their kings; the worship of King 'Ubūdat ['bdt]/Obodas (r. 96-85 BC) in the Negev seems to have persisted into the third century (Negev, 'Obodas', 59).

²⁴ Al-Anṣārī, *Qaryat al-Fāw*, 23, 85.

²⁵ Both statues are studied in detail by Sinān, *al-Funūn*, 100 ff.

²⁶ Sinān, *al-Funūn*, 99 f., fig. 11 at 99.

al-Fāw and thought to be of religious significance, twelve are of deities, two are votive and two are of indeterminate functions. The vast majority are iconographically Hellenistic; so also are the zoomorphic statues found there.²⁷ Many centuries earlier, at Taymā', the Hamra Cube representing a sacrificial act incorporated the image of the Egyptian Apis.²⁸

The adaptation of iconographies and the import of ready-made idols, or their local manufacture according to adapted models which might have no specific local iconographic interpretation, must be seen to have been a common practice in Arabia wherever economic conditions permitted, and may provide interesting material for the interpretation of the Meccan deity Hubal and of the use of the divine name Allāh. The three temples excavated in Qaryat al-Fāw are all dedicated to a multiplicity of deities, some simultaneously and others in chronological succession. Among these deities were Sin (of contested provenance), succeeded by Shams (seemingly a generic deity, at least in south Arabia, and liable to individualisation),²⁹ at one temple, and 'Athtar and another with the epithet 'Athtar Wadd. Inscriptions also mention 'Athtar *al-Shāriq. But the most ubiquitous was Kahl: no statue of this particular deity seems to have been recovered, but his name or monogram occurs on dedicatory, supplicatory and votive inscriptions, funerary slabs, coins minted there, altars and weights.³⁰ In one inscription, Kahl is mentioned together with *Lāh.³¹ This conjunction of deities could indicate multiple worship by the same group; other conjunctions, particularly in temples, seem to imply a situation where more than one group of votaries used the same temple to worship their respective deities. Neither arrangement was unusual.

Other relatively local, less durable divinities of bygone or contemporary peoples are mentioned in the Qur'ān. The mention of Wadd, Suwā', Ya'ūq, Yaghūth and Nasr (Q, 16.21–2, 71.23), attributed to contemporaries of Noah,³² seems to indicate an awareness of the worship of these deities in Najrān, south Arabia, and at Dūmat al-Jandal on the borders with Syria. Wadd is reported to have been represented by a serpent in Najrān,³³ and

²⁷ Sinān, *al-Funūn*, tables at 274, 277, 290.

²⁸ *Routes d'Arabie*, 254 and no. 102. ²⁹ Robin, 'Filles de Dieu', 133 f.

³⁰ *Routes d'Arabie*, nos. 129, 130, 138, 139, 140, 207; al-Anṣārī, *Qaryat al-Fāw*, 21, 28; Robin, 'Antiquité', 95. The weights are discussed by Sinān, *al-Funūn*, 238 ff.

³¹ *Routes d'Arabie*, no. 130.

³² Wellhausen, *Reste*, 14 ff. For the locations of these cults, dispersed in a checkered manner, see Jeffery, 'Ishtar-cult', 280 f.

³³ *Routes d'Arabie*, no. 223. The argument has been made (Crone, 'Religion', 172) that the sparse Qur'ānic mention of Meccan idolatry, and the plentifulness, relatively unspecified, in the context of Biblical stories, suggest that contemporary references are only conceptual. There are many other important contemporary matters that do not appear in the canonical and other texts of the Qur'ān that we have, and conclusions should not be drawn from silence.

had been worshipped in Qaryat al-Fāw under the local aspect of *Wadd Shahrān.³⁴ Nasr, among the Ḥimyarites, also occurs as an oath deity on poetic evidence, and received sacrifices on high ground,³⁵ and seems to have been generically, in singular and plural forms, to have been used to designate Fortune and a protective deity in south Arabia³⁶ – the myth of Luqmān b. ‘Ād has already been mentioned, and may be taken to indicate a wider spread of a deity represented by an eagle.

The Qur’ān refers to other deities of local salience c. 600, and of greater salience for our purposes, mentioned together as a group, namely, Allāt, al-‘Uzzā and Manāt (Q, 16.16, 19; 19.80; 22.72). Many deities mentioned in this and the previous paragraph were listed by Arab antiquarians.³⁷ These more durable deities are of greater pertinence to the development of the argument proposed here; their spread covers the three regions in which Arab deities may be seen to have constituted three major constellations: central Arabia (including southern Ḥijāz), northern Arabia (northern Ḥijāz and the desert tribes in southern Syria), and south Arabia, which was by all accounts very distinctive.³⁸ It should be borne in mind that the categorical distinction that is often made between the religions of sedentary and nomadic Arabs does not seem to be especially relevant, in view of the palpable continuities between them, and does not constitute a reliable base for a taxonomy of the divine. Major trans-local sanctuaries were often located very much in the wild, including a settlement like Mecca. Many of the divinities referred to in the Qur’ān, and others of which memories persisted and which were mentioned in the Arabic literary sources, were recorded by Ibn al-Kalbī, and are plotted on [Map 3](#).

Worship of a deity called Allāt is attested extremely widely among Arabs, *madar* and *wabar*, ‘Āriba and Musta‘riba alike, and among non-Arabs as well – the question of Arab as opposed to non-Arab deities is a moot point and of no pertinence, both because one cannot speak of a central Arab instance that organised religion for the Arabs before Muḥammad and his successors, and because treating deities in terms of origins and of diffusion is, over and above antiquarian interest, of only limited analytical and interpretative value.³⁹ In any case, Allāt, like al-‘Uzzā and Manāt, was

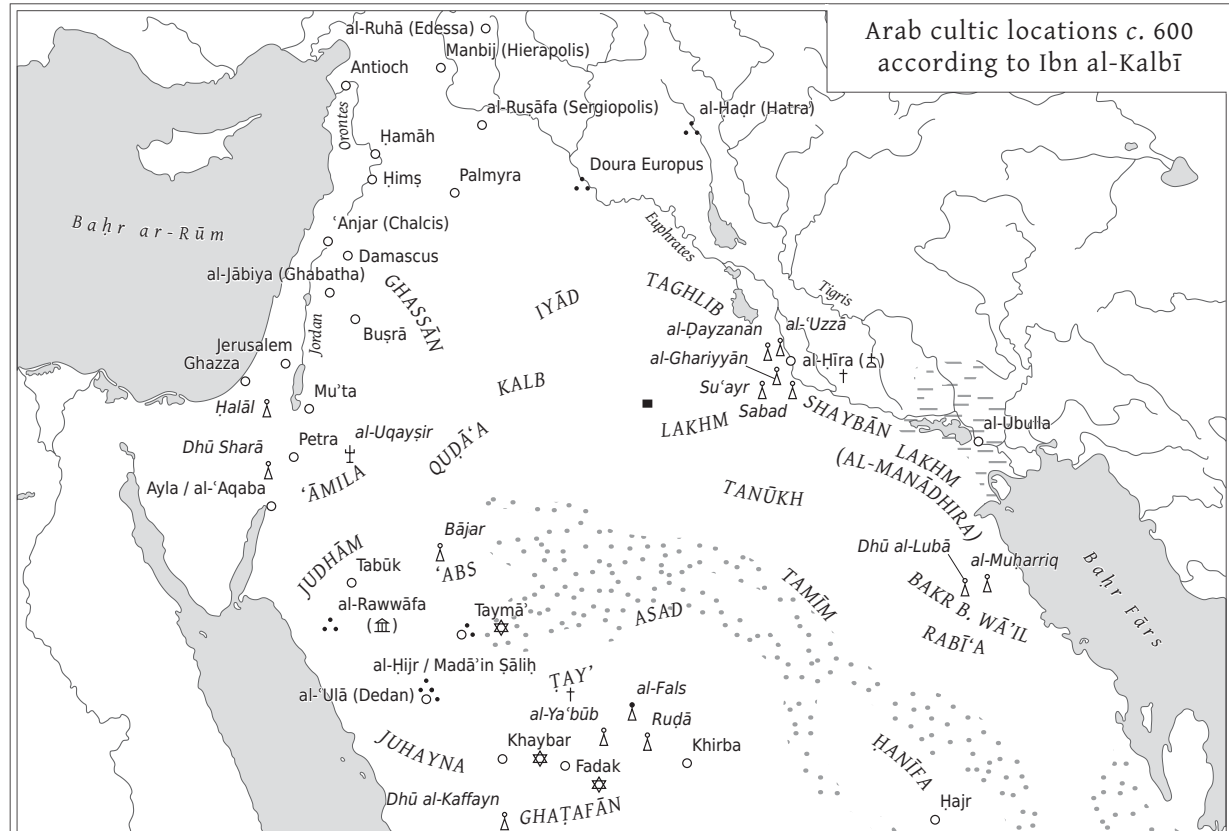
³⁴ *Routes d’Arabie*, no. 136. ³⁵ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 317; Müller, ‘Adler’, 107 and *passim*.

³⁶ Robin, ‘Matériaux’, 15 f., 72 ff.

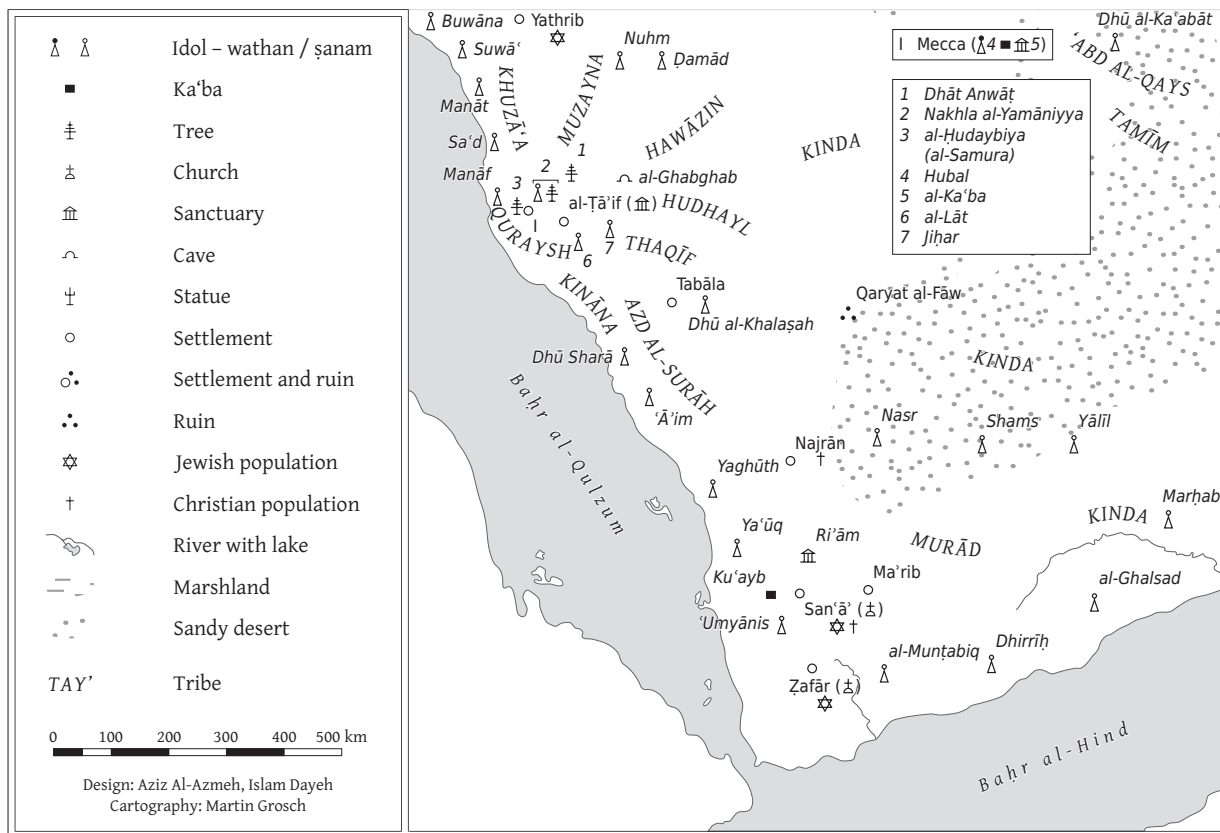
³⁷ Fundamentally by Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣnām*, *passim*, and see, among others, Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 315 ff., and especially the list of Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamhara*, 491 ff. Cf. Grimme, *Muḥammad*, 2.69.

³⁸ Ryckmans, *Religions arabes*, 5.

³⁹ Macdonald (‘Dancing girls’, 7) suggests that the martial ‘Azīzu and Arsū should be interpreted as protectors from, rather than of, the Bedouin Arabs.



Map 3 Arab cultic locations c. 600 according to Ibn al-Kalbī



Map 3 (cont.)

worshipped in the Ḥijāz half a millennium after they had appeared in Palmyra, Nabataea and elsewhere.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, her cults cut across the three divisions just indicated and stretched beyond, from the principalities of Edessa and Palmyra to the northern part of the Yemen, through lesser and indeed very obscure and marginal places. Cults of this deity persisted for more than a millennium, from the fifth century BC to the time of Muḥammad,⁴¹ with some indications of her presence in some form or another as early and as far as Ugarit (fl. c. 1450–1200 BC).⁴²

The deity bearing this name was polyvalent and polymorphous, and was in effect many local and functional deities connected by a proper name. This would legitimately invite the question of whether we are dealing with one deity, or with several who shared a name. What matters for the present account are her locations of cultic specification at very different points of application, without any unwarranted assumptions of a common origin, of a common theology or of a common iconography or repertoire of epithets or epicleses.

One need not, therefore, assume that Allāt is necessarily the same deity known as *ʾl-ʾlt* or *Lt* (in Safaitic), or *ʾlt* (in Nabataean and Palmyrene).⁴³ The name itself is not necessarily of Arabic origin. This point is especially pertinent given the very common view that the name may be derived from the root *ʾl-t*, taken to mean ‘goddess’, with the addition of the Arabic definite article *al-*, or that the name be a feminine form of the Arabic *ʾlh*, which came generically to designate a god from which, it is generally supposed, Allāh was derived. Yet it should be granted that deities may not in fact have been anthropomorphically gendered as a general rule,⁴⁴ and attention needs to be paid to evidence suggesting that, in pre-classical Arabic, natural gender nouns were formed by using different words, and that the shift to morphological gender that became common in Arabic was a later phenomenon.⁴⁵ The form **al-ilāt* (**ʾlʾlt*) does not exist in Arabic sources; the Sabaic *ʾʾlt* conveys a plural form, and in any case the use of the definite article *al-* in Arabic, briefly discussed in the previous chapter, is a phenomenon post-dating the use of the divine name Allāt, and etymological connection with this definite article needs to be excluded.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Macdonald, ‘Arabes en Syrie’, 307. ⁴¹ Krone, *al-Lāt*, ch. 3, *passim*. ⁴² Krone, *al-Lāt*, 30.

⁴³ Macdonald, ‘Arabes en Syrie’, 307. ⁴⁴ Macdonald, ‘Goddesses, dancing girls’, 4 n. 17.

⁴⁵ Different words persisted in classical Arabic, such as *abb* and *umm* for father and mother respectively. See ‘Gender’, *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, 2.158.

⁴⁶ Hämeen-Anttila and Rollinger, ‘Herodot’, 86 f., 87 n. 13, 88. All steps in the argument identifying this deity with Alilat and Alitta mentioned by Herodotus (*Histories*, 1.131.3), identified with Aphrodite, seem faulty, anachronistic and extremely questionable: *ibid.*, 84 nn. 2 and 5, 88 ff. For a more conservative critical estimation of this matter, see Henninger, ‘Sternkunde’, 100 n. 92.

The spread of the name and its application to a variety of local deities clearly has an obscure history which would have involved migrations, exchanges, communications and hegemonies, but this is yet to be reconstructed, if such a reconstruction were to be at all possible. One might find the suggestion interesting that, like the Virgin Mary in Latin countries, Allāt was worshipped under a broad variety of aspects,⁴⁷ but due consideration needs to be taken of the lack of a common, institutionalised and well-organised cult like that of Marianism, and of the fact that Allāt was really more a common divine name given to a variety of local deities than a well-defined sacred person. Nevertheless, like Mary, she was referred to in Palmyra, if the reading of the inscription be correct, as a maiden, *btl̄t*;⁴⁸ neither she nor Athena was alone among deities in the region to whom virginity was attributed; Dhū Sharā is also said to have been born of a virgin mother.⁴⁹

In addition to Allāt's syncretisation with Athena Parthenos, she received other Hellenistic iconographic and epigraphic syncretisations with Ishtar, Tyche/Gād, Nemesis, Atargatis and Minerva.⁵⁰ Of course, such syncretistic assimilations took place over time and under the impact of acculturation and other instances of religious centralisation. The Palmyra Museum holds statues from the local temple of Allāt, of which one, rather crudely sculpted, shows her seated between two lions and dates possibly as early as the first century BC, and another, in marble, in the shape of Athena Parthenos, dates to the fourth century AD, indicating the movement between the local and the cosmopolitan. Closer to the time and territory where Paleo-Islam originated, Allāt is not implausibly reported to have been referred to by the epicleris *bikr* (virgin) in a litany of ritual invocation.⁵¹ The possible mythical configuration in which this occurred, if it existed, remains entirely obscure.

The Hijāzi attributes and functions of this Mistress (*rabba*, *tāghiya*), reflected in epigraphic epithets as well as in theophoric names, were, in the usual way of the gods, connected to protection, wealth, fertility and war, to which have been added some astral, lunar and solar associations.⁵² Clearly, Allāt acquired those aspects, generic, general and specific, transcendent or chthonian and animistic, which were in keeping with local cults. What was

⁴⁷ Teixidor, *Pantheon*, 61.

⁴⁸ Drijvers, 'Inscriptions', 117. The term need not, of course, indicate a *virgo intacta* (see Vermes, *Jesus*, 218 ff) and designates rather a maiden, as in Matthew 1.23 (Leach, 'Virgin birth', 48).

⁴⁹ Fahd, *Panthéon*, 169.

⁵⁰ Drijvers, 'Inscriptions', 117; Krone, *al-Lāt*, §§ 5.2.4.1-3, 6.1.1-6; Sourdél, *Cultes*, 68, 71 f.; Starcky, 'Allath', 121 ff.; *Land des Baal*, pl. 195 (Damascus National Museum, no. 4219/5216); *Moi, Zénobie*, pl. 142.

⁵¹ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 313.

⁵² Krone, *al-Lāt*, 241 f., 254 f. and §§ 6.2.1-3, *passim*.

said of Syrians under Rome, that they 'moved in a world of aboriginal gods and goddesses',⁵³ might be applied to Allāt and other overarching deities in Arabia as well.

To propose that Allāt and other deities may have been epiphanies of Venus, or that she was a feminine Ba'al,⁵⁴ and to suggest creatively all manner of pairings, triads, epiphanies, as is often encountered in modern scholarship, does not carry conviction and seems unnecessarily far-fetched, subtending a theology and mythography far too firm for the purposes of analysing the religions under consideration. Allāt was a favourite Arab oath deity (*Schwurgöttin*),⁵⁵ invoked, like other deities, to swear by, to curse or to confirm oaths. This seems evident not only from epigraphy, but from ancient Arabic poetry as well, where Allāt is sworn by in conjunction with al-'Uzzā,⁵⁶ the association of various forces in the same formula needing to be considered less an indication of a theological and mythical association, than the multiplication of elocutionary force with which an oath (or a curse) is energised.

With the sanction of her curse, Allāt, or rather forms of the name rendered as such as indicated above, and as with other deities, protected the sanctity of tombs from violation, a phenomenon in evidence throughout the area stretching from where Nabataean, Thamūdean and Safaitic inscriptions are found up to the region of Edessa.⁵⁷ Also like other deities, we see from Safaitic inscriptions that she protected asylum and witnessed agreements.⁵⁸ Needless to say, deities also warded off the evil eye.⁵⁹

'Azīzu (and to a far lesser extent, Mun'imu) was equally prevalent, but far more sparsely, from Antioch to Edessa, through to Palmyra and down to Ḥawrān along Arab lines of communication, and in some parts of the Syrian steppe, with hardly any incidence in the Arabian Peninsula proper except perhaps as an epithet shared with other preternatural beings (al-'Azīz, later applied to Allāh). He was portrayed in a warlike aspect, sometimes with an eagle, an iconography that, one would presume, betokened protective powers.⁶⁰ Some of his now-forgotten functions may have been far more general, and are stratigraphically preserved in the Syrian dialect of today. Hail-stones are still called *ḥabb al-'Azīz*, al-'Azīz's pellets; however, this implies not that he may have been a 'fertility god' or a 'storm god', but

⁵³ Butcher, *Roman Syria*, 341. ⁵⁴ Fahd, *Panthéon*, 168.

⁵⁵ Krone, *al-Lāt*, 15. ⁵⁶ For instance, *AGH*, 21.114.

⁵⁷ Healey, *Tomb Inscriptions*, H.5, 7, 11; Drijvers and Healey, *Syriac Inscriptions*, AS20(D35), BS2(D2); Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 2.175 ff.

⁵⁸ Littmann, *Safaitic Inscriptions*, no. 179, 180; Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 2.175.

⁵⁹ Ryckmans, *Religions arabes*, 22.

⁶⁰ Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs*, 147 ff.; Sourdél, *Cultes*, 29, 75 f.; *LIMC*, III/1.69 ff., III/2.1, 2, 5.

simply that his functions as a deity were in the normal way generalised according to need, and occasionally made to serve all purposes.

Across a geographically more restricted area, in north-west and central Arabia including incidences at Qaryat al-Fāw, we again meet with deities like the Thamūdīc and Safaitic *Rdw* (*Ruḏā), and with *Khl*, *Šms*, *Dtn*, *Šrq*, *ʿtr* and others, who are supplicated without distinct functional differentiation for rain, nourishment, progeny and love, and to whom a variety of different and sometimes unspecified petitions were made.⁶¹ The Arabs do not seem to have made sharp distinctions between deities,⁶² and considering this or that deity primarily as a god of fertility or of fate or of whatever other capacity, or indeed a 'high god', does not seem to be promising, and is the effect of conceptions extrapolated more from elaborated mythologies than from cultic practice at points of application.

More geographically restricted than Allāt, but of greater moment than the deities mentioned in the previous paragraph, was al-ʿUzzā, and to a lesser extent Manāt, under the forms (and possible forms allowed by inscriptions) of *han-ʿUzzā (Liḥyānite), *Uzzayān (Sabaic), *Uzzāya (Nabataean), ʾlʿzy (Qaryat al-Fāw) and *Manōtu or *Manātu (Nabataean) *Mnwt*/Manwa (Qurʾānic orthography, possibly Nabataean) and *Manawātu.⁶³ These two, together with Allāt, are thought to have been considered by the Meccans as Allāh's daughters and to have been connected in some way historically. According to Arabic literary sources, Manāt was the first to appear, followed by Allāt, with al-ʿUzzā coming last,⁶⁴ at least in the Ḥijāz. There is little in the inscriptions to sustain this view,⁶⁵ but the account of the Arabic sources betrays some evidence that the introduction of these deities into the Ḥijāz was recent enough to leave traces of a remembrance of succession, however imprecise the details.

Al-ʿUzzā also was ancient, appearing in Dadanitic inscriptions in north-west Arabia of the fourth to third centuries BC.⁶⁶ Her geographical spread describes an arc starting in eastern Sinai, stretching across former Nabataean lands, including Ḥawrān, into north-west and central Arabia, with a strong

⁶¹ Winnett *et al.*, *Ancient Records*, nos. 23, 80, 81; al-Dhīyib, *Nuqūsh Thamūdīyya min Jubba*, no. 111; al-Dhīyib, *Nuqūsh Thamūdīyya jadīda min al-Jawf*, nos. 26, 29–32, 39; Fahd, *Panthéon*, 145 f.; Robin, 'Inscriptions', 549.

⁶² Grimme, *Texte*, 150.

⁶³ Healey, *Tomb Inscriptions*, 118; Winnett, 'Daughters', 119; Robin, 'Filles de Dieu', 141; Sinān, *al-Funūn*, 295 f.

⁶⁴ Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣnām*, 16 f. This is accepted by at least one modern scholar: Teixidor, *Pantheon*, 16 f.

⁶⁵ Winnett, 'Daughters', 116. ⁶⁶ Zayadine, 'Al-ʿUzza-Aphrodite', 113.

presence in al-Ḥīra where she seems to have been the tutelary deity of the Naṣrids.⁶⁷

Manāt for her part seems to have been confined to areas of north-west and central Arabia, with little incidence in limitrophic areas, although the earliest epigraphic mention of her as *Mnwt* comes from fifth-century BC south Arabia.⁶⁸ But little incidence does not mean no incidence at all, the obscurity of this deity's history notwithstanding. A soldier from a Palmyrene contingent in the Roman army erected a humble votive structure to her, with an inscription in Latin calling her *Manavat*, at Várhely in Hungary.⁶⁹ Although one must be wary of deriving divine personalities, powers and functions from the lexical elaboration of the Arabic (or other) trilateral root of a name, there may be some merit to the common view that one capacity of Manāt could have been the meting out of fate. The connection making Manāt 'a fate goddess' is purely etymological,⁷⁰ and not necessarily realised semantically or 'theologically' in this manner. If this were to be so, it would have brought her into some connection with Gād, Tyche or Fortuna, a very widespread deity among the Aramaeans, for which there is no evidence – she was normally identified as Aphrodite. The Arabs called the force of fate Jadd; its effective divinisation was expressed in oaths and by the theophoric compound 'Abd al-Jadd.⁷¹ It was a force generally considered impersonal, but was also assimilated to a variety of deities, including the ubiquitous Allāt, and was occasionally personified in her own right.⁷²

In view of the foregoing, it would appear unwise to ascribe specific functions, coherent theological profiles, or cogent mythological or cosmological personalities or roles to each of these and other Arab deities. We have seen that they had a propensity both to take on a variety of functions, and to perform a fairly stable repertoire of standard divine tasks. In all, one might well agree with Robin's view, based on south Arabian materials, that there seems to have been no hierarchy among the profusion of divinities.⁷³

In this context, it can be presumed that there was a turnover of the divine, with circumstances such as the dominance of a particular lineage over a specific territory bringing new divinities in their train, or that effective divinities might be imported or representations of outside divinities indigenised, and new ones installed. One ancient but telling example of which there is a clear record is the official installation of the deity *Ṣalmu

⁶⁷ Winnett, 'Daughters', 117 f. ⁶⁸ Robin, 'Filles de Dieu', 142 f.

⁶⁹ Healey, *Tomb Inscriptions*, 119; Winnett, 'Daughters', 118 f.

⁷⁰ Cf. Caskel, *Schicksal*, 24.

⁷¹ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 146; Ringgren, *Fatalism*, 29.

⁷² *Moi, Zénobie*, pl. 166.

⁷³ Robin, 'Filles de Dieu', 127 ff.

(*šlm hgm*) at Taymā' in the fifth to fourth centuries BC, recorded on a famous stele, invested both by a priest and by the other gods of the town, including *Šlm Mḥrm*,⁷⁴ *Šlm* qualified by a toponymic epithet. The consecration by the latter of his unqualified namesake – with a name meaning 'image' inflected by Akkadian⁷⁵ – may betoken importation or a sense of hierarchy, but this might be taken to imply mutual recognition rather than hierarchy, and parity of action rather than the subsumption of the qualified by the unqualified name.

Robin discussed Yemeni deities indistinctly designated and undifferentiated ('daughters of 'Il', to which we shall return briefly later), without evident institutional moorings, and mentions anonymous domestic deities as well.⁷⁶ This would suggest an anonymous kratophany, not unlike that of the *jinn*. Before we go on to the next step in the discussion, a few words would therefore be in order about a not unrelated matter, that of the impersonal force of fortune, connected in its *modus operandi* with that of divinities as conceived overall among the Arabs, a power diffusely ubiquitous.

The impersonal, abstract and unpredictable kratophany designating at once fate, destiny, lot and time was known in Arabic as *al-Dahr* carrying the masculine gender (comparable to the Greek *Aeion* and the Middle Persian *Zurvān*).⁷⁷ In a more toyingly personalised plural form, given an anthropomorphic aspect,⁷⁸ similar concepts of lot as *al-Manāyā* (the Fates, *Moirai* – the Arabic feminine singular, *al-maniyya*, means death), at times used synonymously with *al-zamān*, time, and indeed with *al-ayyām*, the days,⁷⁹ convey the idea of evanescent passage in an unpredictable and fateful environment, in which misfortune and death can strike at any time.⁸⁰ Subject to fate and its various names and actions are both humanity and

⁷⁴ *Routes d'Arabie*, no. 311 and the discussion at 562; Dalley, 'Stelae', 27; Hausleiter, 'Divine representation', 301. It would seem superfluous to interpret this divine name with reference to the Aramaic common noun *ṣalma* generally meaning 'idol', or the Akkadian sense of image, statue, representation, or indeed its homonyms black and dark (on which Dalley, 'Stelae', 238). *Šalmu* seems native to the city, the incidence of his name in Mesopotamia probably due to Taymanite presence there, and the name is compounded in numerous theophoric personal names (M. Macdonald, personal communication; Dalley, 'Stelae', 28).

⁷⁵ M. Macdonald, personal communication. ⁷⁶ Robin, 'Filles de Dieu', 126, 132, 137 f.

⁷⁷ This last connection is brought out in some detail, but somewhat overdrawn historically, by Tamer, *Zeit*, 138 ff., 145 ff.

⁷⁸ Tamer, *Zeit*, 65. ⁷⁹ See the discussion of Caskel, *Schicksal*, 42.

⁸⁰ The congeniality of the notion of an ethically neutral Fate to military castes is well brought out by Weber (*Sociology*, 36) and is suggestive of our analysis of Arabian conditions which were both precarious and paramilitary.

nature, constituting together a 'Schicksalsgemeinschaft',⁸¹ one in which, as we shall see, fate, like the gods, uses nature against man.

This was a force that was particularly active, ubiquitously expressed in ancient Arabic poetry, sometimes synonymously with time, as a force of destructive passage, one that was animate and operative beyond control.⁸² *Al-Maniyya* was poetically represented as a hunter,⁸³ and as a ghoulish beast with fangs and claws.⁸⁴ It was represented (in the plural *al-manāyā*) as acting blindly and unpredictably, felling down those whom they reached, those missed thereby being condemned to aging and senescence.⁸⁵ *Dahr* accomplishes its work serially, and conflictually.⁸⁶ Often regarded as destroyers alike of peoples, kingdoms and individuals,⁸⁷ the fates were adjudged ineluctable, yet still amenable to propitiation. *Dahr* was not approached only with foreboding, or with cavalier stoicism, but could be engaged and parried,⁸⁸ *al-manāyā* being his daughters.⁸⁹ Arab poets, who frequently used the figure of the hunter as a metaphor for fate and the fates, equally frequently allowed the hunted animals poetically to escape.⁹⁰

Whether these notions were religious or not is a matter that can only be considered in the context of whether or not they had any form of association with cult or with oaths. Caskel maintains that *al-manāyā* came close to being a religious notion when they were seen to come to the aid of humans in their various undertakings, in which case they are addressed in a spirit of piety.⁹¹ In this case, they join a realm of beings that dispense fate, including Manāt the goddess. But an association between Manāt and the *Manāya* of the poets, as already signalled by Nöldeke, is neither a necessary nor an obvious assumption.⁹² It was only later, with Muḥammad, that Fate was seen, after the image of God, as a definable personal actor, and was decried on this score,⁹³ being taken as a substitute for religion.⁹⁴

⁸¹ Tamer, *Zeit*, 84.

⁸² *LA*, s.v. 'm-n-n'; 'Dahr', *EL*, 2.946. For extended treatments, see Caskel, *Schicksal*, supplemented with additional material by Ringgren, *Fatalism*. Al-Rahmūnī (*Maḥmūd al-Dahr*) provides a most useful study of the semantic fields of these and other relevant terms in ch. 1, going beyond the lexical and morphological considerations of Caskel, *Schicksal*, 42 ff. Most recently, Tamer, *Zeit*, 54 ff. Most interesting conceptual distinctions are made by Abdesselem, *Thème de la mort*, 69 ff.

⁸³ Caskel, *Schicksal*, 28 f. ⁸⁴ Tamer, *Zeit*, 67 f., 68 n. 189.

⁸⁵ See for instance the Mu'allaqa of Zuhayr, l. 57, in Tabrizi, *Sharḥ*.

⁸⁶ See for instance a poem by Farwa b. Musayk, in *SIH*, 4.169.

⁸⁷ For instance, *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, 9.39–41 (Mutammim b. Nuwayra, d. c. 650).

⁸⁸ For instance: al-A'shā, *Dīwān*, 1.61.

⁸⁹ Caskel, *Schicksal*, 50; Tamer, *Zeit*, 66–7 n. 185. ⁹⁰ Rūmīya, *al-Qaṣīda*, 458 ff.

⁹¹ Caskel, *Schicksal*, 53, and the critical comment of Tamer, *Zeit*, 3.

⁹² Nöldeke, review of Wellhausen, *Reste*, 709. ⁹³ Q, 45.24, and cf. Mujāhid, *Tafsīr*, § 1562.

⁹⁴ Caskel, *Schicksal*, 56 f., where the author sees the notion of Fate persisting in Islam, understood as Destiny and underlying fatalism – see also *ibid.*, 10, 20 ff. Cf. Abdesselem, *Thème de la mort*, 70, and Tamer, *Zeit*, 68 ff., on *dahr* and Allāh.

Time: celestial and cultic

Consideration of the alleged astralism of Arab religions is an excellent vantage point from which to start examining their underlying forms of order, beyond the scatter of names.⁹⁵ But it should be borne in mind that the greatest caution is called for in astralist interpretations of Arab divinities, especially when, as one often witnesses in relevant scholarship, a certain deity is said to designate or to be designated by the sun, the moon or Venus. Similar caution is called for against the overinterpretation of the material available, against the ascription of a cosmic theology along Chaldaean lines, with the assumption that, for the Arabs, or for some at least, the stars themselves were divinities.⁹⁶

This said, it must be admitted that in those parts of the Fertile Crescent inhabited by Arabs that had witnessed Hellenistic acculturation, such as Palmyra, an astral association of divinity, whatever this might betoken, is evident, iconographically represented by the nimbus and the crescent. Clearly, this needs to be considered in tandem with the greater degree of syncretisation discussed above, and the fact remains that an astral character of deities worshipped by Arabs is a phenomenon confined to areas with long-term contact with more centralising cultures influenced by empire,⁹⁷ cultically and as a secondary result of theological or mythographic cultures. Further north, in northern Mesopotamia, the cult of Sin, the Babylonian moon-god, is well attested, and a stellar pagan cult (and theology) in Ḥarrān persisted until well into the tenth century.⁹⁸

Yet, theological elaboration apart, the interpretation of stellar associations is extremely difficult, and the astral associations ascribed to Arab divinities in the steppe and desert are even more so. The uncertainty arises primarily from the precise nature of the relationship that might be suggested between heavenly bodies and divinities, and the precise form of action that a heavenly body might exercise, in the absence of astrological

⁹⁵ It might be noted that there was much symbolic and standard metaphorical use of the stars by the Arabs: 'Ajīna, *Asāṭīr*, 1.193 ff.; Montgomery, 'Empty Ḥijāz', 92 ff.

⁹⁶ Wellhausen (*Reste*, 209) rejected the astral character ascribed to Arab deities altogether, and Caskel (*Schicksal*, 55), concluded that Arabic poetry preserves no traces of astral 'fatalism'. Rodinson ('Lune', 164) expressed some surprise at the fact that the Arabs had no moon cult, with the surmise that this had been somehow 'effaced'. It is noteworthy that the later use of the moon crescent in Muslim iconography began with Umayyad coins, clearly under the emblematic impact of Sasanian royal iconography ('Hilāl', *EL*, 3.381).

⁹⁷ See Henninger ('Sternkunde', 103, 118), who nevertheless suspected the existence of a Venus cult, with reserve.

⁹⁸ Seyrig, 'Prétendue syncretisme solaire', 150 f., and *passim*; Drijvers, 'Syrian cult relief', 74 ff.; Segal, 'Arabs', 97.

lore and a belief in astral determinism, or of a cosmographic theology structured along lines best expressed in Chaldaeanism and Neo-Platonism. Finally, interpretation is often led astray by the still persisting primacy given to etymology and semantic free association, often in an attempt to demonstrate foreign origins for the phenomena under consideration.⁹⁹

At most, if the belief indeed existed among the Arabs that stars might indicate felicitous fortune (*saʿd*) or misfortune (*nahs*) according to their ascent or descent, this will need to be treated, not as an indication of astral religion or astrological determinism, but much as augury by the flight of birds (*zajr*) is read as a portent depending on the direction of their flight (*sāniḥ/bāriḥ*) – the former, flight from left to right, was considered inauspicious in Najd, but auspicious elsewhere, and vice versa.¹⁰⁰ In neither case is there a consideration of causality: what we have are abstract indices. This parallelism between inauspicious and auspicious stars and the flight of birds is explicitly brought out in a strophe by the sixth-century poet ʿAmr b. Qamīʿa.¹⁰¹ That an index might have a religious connotation arises only from its having a connection with the presence of an absent agent (*al-ghayb*), as Signs (*āyāt*).

The existence of a cult to Shams from the al-Jawf area, attested by two Thamūdīc inscriptions,¹⁰² does not seem to be particularly relevant in the context; we saw above that Shams may have been a generic divine name rather than designating the heavenly body as a god. The same might be said of the use, in what regions it is not known, of the epithet *al-ilāha* or *al-alāha* for the sun.¹⁰³ Like Allāt, Shams may have been a divine name without further reference. Nevertheless, it is well to remember that the Babylonian king Nabonidus and his court resided in Taymāʾ and were militarily active throughout northern Arabia (including Medina) during the period BC 552–545, and one could safely presume that they brought their deities, some of them astral, along with them,¹⁰⁴ and that these may

⁹⁹ For instance, Eilers, 'Stern–Planet–Regenbogen', *passim* and 124, where al-Shiʿrā, Sirius, is rendered as 'stella hirsuta'.

¹⁰⁰ AGH, 11.8; ʿAlī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.786 ff. See also ʿAlwān, *Muʿtaqadāt*, 90 f.

¹⁰¹ Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shiʿr*, 1.377. The same might be said of the 'cult of fire' that pagan Arabs are sometimes supposed to have observed: they did, as indicated above, seem to build fires as they concluded alliances, and pleaded with the gods to withdraw the benefits of fire from whoever might break the agreement. They also had a variety of other symbolic uses of fire, none of which appears to have been religious. Salt was similarly involved symbolically in agreements. See al-Jāhiz, *al-Hayawān*, 4.470 ff., 479; al-Thaʿalibī, *Thimār*, no. 947.

¹⁰² Al-Dhīyib, *Nuqūsh Thamūdīyya jadīda min al-Jawf*, nos. 26, 39.

¹⁰³ Qutrub, *Azmina*, 14.

¹⁰⁴ For Nabonidus' inscriptions from Taymāʾ, see Müller and al-Said, 'Nabonid'.

have persisted in some form or another, including the employment of the name.

The ancient Babylonian and Canaanite goddess Ishtār, often associated with the morning and evening stars, had a wide incidence, from Mesopotamia and Syria down to Yemen, her name taking on a variety of forms.¹⁰⁵ Apart from the question of gender, where Ishtār was perplexingly feminine in the north and masculine in central and south Arabia,¹⁰⁶ this was a divinity with a strong presence in south Arabia – along with *ʾlmqh* (**lmaqqah?* **lmaquh(u)?*), long assumed to have been ‘the moon-god’ – but is poorly attested elsewhere. Inscriptions mentioning *Šrq* and *ʿtr* at Qaryat al-Fāw were noted above, and these are connected to Yemenite cults with a very high degree of probability. A Thamūdīc inscription from the al-Jawf area invokes *ʿttrsm*, ‘Athtar of the heavens’.¹⁰⁷ A very much earlier image incised on a rock some 12 km south of Taymā, going back perhaps to as early as the sixth century BC, shows what may be a crescent moon with a rayed star below. Another in the same location shows a star enclosed in a rectangular frame, which some epigraphists chose to interpret as *iwrn*, hence a bull, standing for the moon-god according to a common iconographic interpretation.¹⁰⁸ Another Thamūdīc figure alongside an inscription some 100 km north of Ḥāʾil depicts what may be a crescent.¹⁰⁹

But this is dangerous ground indeed, both empirically. and analytically. There seems little justification in ascribing astral cults to late antique Arabs, or for identifying divinities like *Rḏw* or indeed al-ʿUzzā and al-ʿAzīz with Venus, let alone being ‘aspects’ of this planet,¹¹⁰ without indicating how the term ‘aspect’ might be interpreted. Detailed examination has uncovered no astral associations for Allāt.¹¹¹ At some distance in time, some Arabic literary sources do ascribe worship of the heavenly bodies to some late antique Arabs, in a manner inflected by knowledge of Ḥarrānian astralism and animated by a heresiographic spirit. But the more discriminating authors were sceptical,¹¹² and regarded the matter in a manner more complicated than the crude ascription of such beliefs to pagan Arabs, as if to expand,

¹⁰⁵ Albright, *Yahweh*, 117; Henninger, ‘Venusgottheit’, 152 ff.

¹⁰⁶ Winnett, ‘Daughters’, 125 f. Discussions of this matter might benefit from a consideration of the distinctions in Arabic and other Semitic languages between personal and non-personal gender, and between marked and unmarked gender, beyond simple considerations of ‘natural’ gender: Baʿalbaki, *Fiqh al-ʿArabiyya*, 46 f.

¹⁰⁷ Winnett, *Ancient Records*, no. 23. ¹⁰⁸ Winnett, *Ancient Records*, 31, 34 and figs. 36–8.

¹⁰⁹ Al-Dhiyib, *Nuqūsh Thamūdīyya min Jubba*, no. 92.

¹¹⁰ For instance, Winnett, *Ancient Records*, 75; Henninger, ‘Problem der Venusgottheit’, 153. But see also the cautionary remarks of Henninger, ‘Sternkunde’ and *Arabica Sacra*, 64 ff., 72 ff.

¹¹¹ Krone, *al-Lāt*, 370. ¹¹² Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, 4.478 f.; Šāʿid al-Andalusī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 116 f.

by enumerative multiplication, the depraved absurdity ascribed to their paganism.

Nevertheless, literary sources do preserve traces and even positive indicators of associating the heavenly bodies with the cults of divinities. St John of Damascus, for one, spoke of an Arab Venus cult under the name of *khavar*,¹¹³ and Bartholomew of Edessa of a *khavar*, commonly and implausibly glossed as the epithet *al-kubrā*, 'the greatest', with reference to the morning star and Aphrodite.¹¹⁴ Other Graecophone and Syriac authors spoke of the Arabs worshipping 'Uzzā, while their women worshipped Venus specifically, and of rites to the sun, the moon and Venus.¹¹⁵ Polemical intent and literary interpolations and associations notwithstanding, it is likely that this will have been entirely the result not of invention, but rather of tendentious interpretation and redaction. Later antiquarians listed heavenly bodies ostensibly worshipped by a number of Arab tribes and peoples: Ḥimyar worshipped the sun, Kināna the moon, Lakhm and Judhām Jupiter, Asad Mercury.¹¹⁶ Arguably astral names of clans are on record, such as the B. Zuhra and, not least, the B. 'Abd Shams. What these names betoken is still a matter for interpretation, and one needs to be alert to the limits of what might be extrapolated from theophoric names, as suggested above. The Qur'ān, most likely with polemical intent, declared God to be the Lord of al-Khunnās and proscribed swearing by it (Q, 81.15, 53.48), this being the five planets invisible by daylight, reportedly worshipped by some nomadic sections of Khuẓā'a and Ghassān.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, the Qur'ān does contain oaths by the sun, the moon, the stars, twilight and sunrise (Q, 91.1, 74.32, 84.18, 53.1, 86.1, 84.16, 89.1, 74.34, 91.1, 93.1).¹¹⁸

However, to conclude that such indications might be seen to affirm that certain heavenly bodies were actually divinised in themselves is doubtful.

¹¹³ Sahas, *John of Damascus*, 137. It should be noted that in some manuscripts of St John's text other terms, *bathan* and *khavothan*, appear in place of *khavar*, which may well render the Arabic *wathan*: Sahas, *John of Damascus*, 86 n. 4. This could lend a more appropriate sense to this vexing *khavar*.

¹¹⁴ Noiville ('Culte de l'étoile', 371 n. 1) gives what appears to be a compendious tally of this *khavar* among Graecophone authors in the various forms of this name, but the overall analysis is wildly improbable. Henninger ('Sternkunde', 104 ff.) quite rightly sees in this reading an interpolation of deities that may have been familiar outside Arabia. It was also suggested over a century ago that this *khavar* was rather a transliteration of the Meccan god Hubal: Violet, 'Psalmsfragment', 478. See the fairly detailed account of Lenormant, 'Culte payen', 127 ff.

¹¹⁵ Healey, *Religion*, 117 f. ¹¹⁶ Šā'id al-Andalusī, *Tabaqāt*, 115 f.; Ibn Sa'id, *Nashwa*, 1.75 f.

¹¹⁷ Ibn Qutayba, *al-Anwā'*, § 141; 'kh-n-s', *LA*; MbS, 4.166, 602. On star worship attributed to the Arabs, from narrative Arabic sources, see 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.58 f. On al-Khunnās, al-Khuns and al-Khunnas, see Forcada, 'Cycle lunaire', 46.

¹¹⁸ Enunciations attributed to Maslama b. Ḥabīb also invoke the sun and the night, in addition to the wolf, sacrificial meat and other matters: Makin, *Representing the Enemy*, 192 ff.

It seems certain that some heavenly bodies were revered, but how generally this reverence was spread cannot be determined precisely; whether they were actually worshipped rather than venerated is a different matter altogether. Ultimately, what needs to be interpreted is reverence, not divinisation. The more promising approach would be one that regarded them as acting in the context of certain associations and conjunctions between the stars and the periodic presences of the divine, not one based on the assumption that these heavenly bodies themselves were considered to be divinities, or were inhabited by divinities, thus being in themselves kratophanic.

Such sympathetic associations of stars and divinities would seem to arise from the linking of heavenly bodies with cultic deities at regular, particular points in time. The poet al-A'shā spoke of prayers offered at sunrise and sunset,¹¹⁹ and an ancient legend of pagan Arabs mentioned above has Luqmān b. 'Ād ascend a mountain and face the rising sun as he supplicated.¹²⁰ For its part, the Qur'ān enjoins giving crepuscular praise to God, before sunrise and before sunset (Q, 50.39). Muḥammad, clearly in a ritual distinction from paganism, and most likely mindful of the pagan Arab lore about demons thriving in the liminal borders between light and darkness, proscribed prayer before the sun is fully risen, and before it has completely set, and associated these two moments with the horns of Satan and with an eastward direction of prayer.¹²¹ Similarly, according to a tradition as ascribed to Ibn 'Abbās, the rainbow, Qaws Quzaḥ or the bow of Quzaḥ, was reportedly renamed by Muḥammad Qaws Allāh, demoting the obscure deity Quzaḥ at Mecca to the status of a demon or an illusion.¹²²

Clearly, the association of divinities with heavenly bodies and meteorological phenomena occurred at moments when they were coincident with cultic schedules and calendars. Deities of earthly residence and effect were receptive at times not so much *set* as *marked* by the stars, which thereby came to act as ritual identifiers of cultic time, markers hallowed by association and, in the more elaborate Qur'ānic redaction, providing Signs (*āyāt*) of the divinities and of the times appropriate for their invocation, in addition to being portents of major events – the latter specifically with reference to falling stars (Q, 56.75–6), on which more later.

¹¹⁹ Al-A'shā, *Dīwān*, 17.21. ¹²⁰ Akhbār 'Ubayd b. Shīrya, 377.

¹²¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 5.53; 'q-r-n' and 'l-'-b', *LA*. See the observant comments of Goldziher, *Abhandlungen*, 1.110 f., 113 ff., which concern the sun, not without some confusion which does not, however, undermine the sense of his discussion. On sunrise and sunset, Ibn Qutayba, *Anwā'*, §§ 168 f.

¹²² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Hay'a*, §§ 9.9, 11; al-Tha'ālibī, *Thimār*, no. 10; Goldziher, *Abhandlungen*, 113 f. Flavius Josephus (*Antiquities*, 15.253) stated that the Arabs of Edom worshipped a deity called Koz, identified as Quzaḥ: Nöldeke, 'Arabs' 661.1.

In light of this, stars could be considered to be cultic accessories, to be venerated as a chalice, an altar, a cross or a Torah scroll might be venerated, or as one might kiss the hem of an imperial robe, without these objects themselves being the objects of cultic worship. They were also regarded as not unlike ritual time-keepers, announcing appropriate moments as did the wooden clappers and church bells of the Christian priests, or, later, the *mu'adhdhin* from his minaret. An instructive comparison can be drawn with a Babylonian seal depicting the worship by a priest or king of objects representing Mardūk and Nabu, neither of whom was an astral. In the sky beyond is represented a moon crescent.¹²³ There is no suggestion of moon worship, and the most likely interpretation is ritual conjunction.

For the Arabs, it is much more likely that the heavenly bodies, marking cultic time, acted as masters and mistresses of ceremonies announcing times when kratophanic potencies were unlocked. Kratophanic action was not theirs, but that of the deities invoked, whose invocation was synchronised with the movements of the heavenly bodies. Precise timing is an essential constituent of all ritual.

Mundane time

The Arab system of *anwā'* (sg. *naw'*) has been generally considered to be based upon the acronychal (twilight) setting and helical rising of a series of stars and constellations, and upon the twenty-eight lunar stations.¹²⁴ Recent research has clarified matters more precisely, and shown that a *naw'* in fact stood for the interval of time between the actual rising of the sun and the cosmical (dawn) setting of a star is observed.¹²⁵ This system determined expectations of rain and other climatic changes, and it would not be unnatural to expect that the *anwā'* may have set a calendar for specific and regular rituals of invocation and propitiation designed to unlock unseen powers so they could maintain and not break natural regularities on which precarious life depended, in addition to serving purposes related to individual fortunes, calamities, hopes and fears.¹²⁶ South Arabians (but

¹²³ *Babylon: Wahrheit*, no. 129, Abb. 135.

¹²⁴ See the chart of one *anwā'* system, indicating constellations, dates of setting, and duration in Kennedy, *Historical Atlas*, 2; 'Anwā', 'Manāzil', *El*, and the comment thereon by Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 602 n. 556.

¹²⁵ Varisco, 'Origin', 10, 10 n. 9.

¹²⁶ On such 'calendrical' rituals connected with control over nature and natural regularity, see in general Bell, *Ritual*, 103 f.

not others, on available evidence) may have divinised the *naw*’ under the theonym of Dhāt Hīmīyam.¹²⁷

The Qur’ān (Q, 53.49) mentions Sirius, al-Shi‘rā, a star ‘falling’ or setting at dawn, in January/February, with determinate connections with climate, being a marker of the *bāriḥ* wind, albeit subject to the Qur’ānic deity. It also refers to a falling star (Q, 53.1), clearly a reference to the Pleiades’ ‘falling’, marking a time of rain and plenty,¹²⁸ like Suhayl (Canopus) and al-Jawzā’ (Gemini), all three ‘falling’ between October and January. The Qur’ān also mentions indeterminate stars as navigation guides, subject to their Lord (among others, Q, 16.16, 55.6, 6.97, 7.54, 16.12).¹²⁹ Needless to say, it should be kept in mind that the rising and setting of specific stars occur at slightly different times according to latitude, with a gap of about a week between Yemen and southern Syria.

As might be expected, the Arabs were able navigators by the stars.¹³⁰ They had an ample and precise meteorological and astronomical lexicon that governed seasonal movements between their settlements and outlying areas in search of pasture¹³¹ – and the markets associated with these movements. Ancient Arabic poetry is replete with references to these matters, and the conjunctions between climatic phenomena and the rise and fall of stars and constellations were common knowledge.¹³² The Arabs were particularly

¹²⁷ Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 341 ff.; Robin, ‘Matériaux’, 14.

¹²⁸ Cf. Mujaḥid, *Tafsīr*, § 1760; Ibn Qutayba, *Anwā’*, 23, 30. But the rising as opposed to the setting of the Pleiades was associated with arid heat, which ends with the rising of Canopus (Suhayl) in late August: Gotheil, ‘Kitāb al-Maṭar’, 283 f. This reading of Canopus was attested among Rwala Bedouins in the early twentieth century (Varisco, ‘Origin’, 17), and is attested widely today among Arabs of the Peninsula and the countryside.

¹²⁹ See Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 600–1 n. 549.

¹³⁰ For details, al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 2.212 ff. Arabic traditions had somewhat exaggerated this, which may have been confined to knowledge of some twenty heavenly objects of relevance to navigation. A recent American nautical almanac mentions some fifty altogether, and the earlier astrolabes used between fifteen and twenty. See Kunitzsch (*Sternnamenklatur*, 29 f., 201, 203), who maintains that some 300 names of stars and constellations, many of ‘Semitic origin’, may have been known to the Arabs, but with all five planets having names that are exclusively Arabic.

¹³¹ Al-Tha’alibī, *Fiqh*, 277 ff. 351 ff. For details of Arab meteorology, see Ibn Qutayba, *Anwā’*, *passim*. For seasonal movements and expectations of weather changes, Ibn Qutayba, *Anwā’*, §§ 108, 122 ff. The Arabs had a vast and precise lexicon of meteorological conditions and their consequences, always correlated to the positions and movements of the moon and the sun: al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 2.28 ff., 39 ff., 50 ff. There was a detailed lexicon relating to different kinds of rain and their effect: Gotheil, ‘Kitāb al-Maṭar’, 284 ff. and Varisco, ‘Rain periods’, 255 ff. Not unsurprisingly, this lexicon also comprised a precise vocabulary designating different tones of the darkness of night, of the length of day and night, of shades, shadows and mirages: *ibid.*, 2.223 ff., 230 ff., 239 ff., 259 ff., no less than for the types of cloud, thunder and lightning, and the effect of different types of rain upon land and vegetation (*ibid.*, 2.93 ff., 102 ff., 113 ff.). On gradations of light at sunset and sunrise, and parts of the night and day, see especially Qutrūb, *al-Azmina*, 131 ff.

¹³² For instance: *al-Mufaddaliyyāt*, 120.50 (‘Alqamah b. ‘Abdāh b. al-Nu‘mān b. Qays, c. 600). See Ibn Qutayba, *al-Anwā’*, §§ 133 ff.; Aghā, *Dhū’r-Rumma*, 62 ff.; Varisco, ‘Origin’, 12.

sensitive to nature and keen observers and cataloguers of her ways, a fact related to their extreme exposure and susceptibility to her unruliness. The association of specific types of wind expected at different times, their sounds and effects, was noted and expressed in an elaborate vocabulary.¹³³

Yet the movements of the stars and of the heavens in general, excepting prodigies (comets and meteors), were regarded not as preternatural portents, but as indicators of regular and predictable changes in climate.¹³⁴ When expected rains failed to materialise, and as a result wells were expected to remain dry and pasture sparse if at all available, then clearly the deities would have to be supplicated with a rite that was, with the Muslims, to become *ṣalāt al-istisqāʾ*.¹³⁵ If the sky be too tempestuous and the flash-floods too violent, one would also reasonably expect that similar actions would have been taken. This whole body of knowledge associating the movement of the heavens with climate and attendant consequences for the condition of animal husbandry was expressed in *rajaz* and *sajʿ*.¹³⁶

This astro-meteorological system of *anwāʾ* of the Arabs had counterparts elsewhere in the ancient world, where stellar motions were taken as signs for predicting the weather coordinated with stellar phases and, as with the Arabs and the Romans, with the course of the moon.¹³⁷ But the orderliness of the Arab system should not be overestimated, and it is difficult to reconstruct with the precision of later redactions, some of which were clearly contrived to fit antiquarian material into later astronomical knowledge, to such an extent that the system of twenty-eight lunar stations seems both unnecessary and unsupported by sufficient evidence.¹³⁸ A *nawʾ* was connected more with rain periods than with the rising and setting

¹³³ Al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 2.74 ff.

¹³⁴ Caskel (*Schicksal*, 55) agrees, but is ready to admit a belief in felicitous and infelicitous stars (*saʿd* and *naḥs*), using evidence that seems to be later elaborations under the influence of formal astrology – good fortune was associated with Jupiter and Venus, misfortune with Saturn and Mars. The ascription of a religious character to meteorological forces rather than simply a natural regularity seems to be a later Muslim gloss.

¹³⁵ The expression *ʾikhlāf al-nujūm* was used when rains associated with their positions did not materialise: *AGH*, II.162.

¹³⁶ Qutrūb, *al-Azmina*, 102 ff.; al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 2.179 ff. These were interpreted by Pellat ('Dictons rimés', 4) as invocations in *istisqāʾ* rites, an interpretation accepted by Varisco ('Origin', 13), while long ago Sprenger ('Kalender', 164), the first to consider this matter, held these to be the commentaries of caravaneers upon the stars. Al-Marzūqī (*al-Azmina*, 1.178 ff.) provides a very detailed coordinated listing of *anwāʾ* and lunar stations, the seasons, stars and planets, and the climatic and other benefits and disadvantages of each.

¹³⁷ Rodinson, 'Lune', 163; Lehoux, *Astronomy*, 5, 12. Yet beyond the rule of thumb employed by Arabs and the early Greeks, the system was later read by instruments, called *parapegmata*, that tracked cyclical phenomena by the use of a moveable peg or pegs, described and illustrated by Lehoux, *Astronomy*, 16 f. and *passim*.

¹³⁸ Varisco, 'Origin', 7, II; 'Rain periods', 264 ff.

of stars per se, and ancient Arab lore involved systems that may not have been connected with the twenty-eight stations of the moon, and which did include non-Zodiacal stars such as Canopus.¹³⁹

Some of this uncertainty can doubtless be accounted for by the supposition that there will have been more than one system in operation, varying regionally, and almost entirely obscure but for some information we have about certain tribal sections having particularly well-regarded expertise in matters concerning the stars.¹⁴⁰ One would also need to factor in that this lunar zodiac needed calendrical adaptation to the solar year,¹⁴¹ and this adaptation will have been, in all probability, subject to regional variation as well. And while it is probably safe to suppose that cultic practices were coordinated with this lunar zodiac, the more important coordination for larger-scale cultic practices and associations involved some form of rudimentary calendrical association, marking (but not measuring) time by the conjunction of the Pleiades with the moon, ultimately coordinating the solar year and the cycles of the moon.

Basic to this concern with the movements of heavenly bodies were seasonal movements and their regulation, with decided consequences for a trans-local cultic calendar, coordinated with that of seasonal markets. The Arabs seem to have had two major seasonal movements away from the areas where they were settled. *Tabaddī* (sometimes *tashrīq*), movement into areas of pasture, took place twice yearly, one timed with the rise of Canopus in autumn and another with the onset of arid conditions in late spring, timed with Aldebaran in May. Both transhumant episodes were followed by periods of settlement, during winter and summer.¹⁴² Both seasons seem, according to one convention, to have been called *Rabīʿ*, distinguished as the first and the second, names to be given to two consecutive months in the Muslim calendar.¹⁴³ But this was only one convention, most likely regional and dialectal, quite possibly influenced, in its eventual redaction, by Meccan usage.¹⁴⁴ As might be expected, there seems to have been a variety of names for seasons among the Arabs, and more than one division of the solar year – into halves or quarters, reflecting different conventions¹⁴⁵ – and a variety of names for months and days, again reflecting dialectal and

¹³⁹ Varisco, 'Rain periods', 253 f.

¹⁴⁰ Such as B. Māwīya of Kalb and B. Murra b. Hammām of Shaybān: al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 1.199.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Varisco, 'Origin', 8. ¹⁴² Al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 2.125 ff.

¹⁴³ Sprenger ('Kalender', 158) specifies the first as late November. For greater specifications, see al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 1.202 f.

¹⁴⁴ See the comments of Rodinson, 'Lune', 163. ¹⁴⁵ Quṭrub, *al-Azmina*, 98.

regional usage,¹⁴⁶ and indeed the use of the same names for months in different sequences. There is mention of the month of Rajab 'according to Muḍar' in Muḥammad's Farewell Oration.¹⁴⁷ The first half of the year only, starting in autumn, seems to have been composed of three periods with two lunations each, for reasons not entirely clear.¹⁴⁸

Months may well have been conceived with variable duration, according to circumstances, with a possibility of omitting or repeating a month,¹⁴⁹ but in all cases divided into units of ten or three days. Arab markets were timed in terms of these, in units of three or ten, expressed in their relative positions along the flow of the lunar month.¹⁵⁰

For calendrical purposes, the Arab synodic month, based on the moon's phases,¹⁵¹ however named and however its separate months were grouped, would last fifty-nine days. This fits uneasily with the solar year,¹⁵² which is the formal indication of the succession of seasons framing the rhythms of transhumance, market activities and associated trans-local cults. Synchronising the two regimes of time reckoning and of time indication requires some form of intervention, and therefore ultimately of control or at least of negotiation.¹⁵³ It is at this point that reckoning by lunations, which is not strictly calendrical,¹⁵⁴ comes to be coordinated with the reckoning of the seasons framed by the solar year, which need not itself be technically calendrical but might be a frame for the indication of specific cyclical times.¹⁵⁵ Once placed together, the result would be a lunar-solar system of time reckoning which governed the rhythms of social relations, including cult, bearing in mind that calendars coordinate and regulate events and do not measure time as such, and, once instituted, their capacity to track natural phenomena successfully becomes of marginal significance.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁶ Al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 1.268 ff., 276 ff.; al-Farrā', *al-Ayyām*, 10 ff., 17 ff., and the shorter account of Quṭrub, *al-Azmina*, 112 f. Few of these names seem to have been mentioned in Arabic poetry, with the exception of Rajab, Šafar and Jumāda: al-Ghiḍāwī, *al-Iḥsās*, 1.470.

¹⁴⁷ *SIH*, 4.185. ¹⁴⁸ Rodinson, 'Lune', 163.

¹⁴⁹ Rodinson, 'Espace', 49. ¹⁵⁰ See the discussion of al-Ghiḍāwī, *al-Iḥsās*, 1.453.

¹⁵¹ Forcada, 'Cycle lunaire', 39 f. ¹⁵² Lehoux, *Astronomy*, 5, 7 f.

¹⁵³ Note that, with reference to the ancient Mediterranean, expressing dates in a format that would make sense in more than one locality was 'an intellectual and organisational challenge of high order': Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, 10.

¹⁵⁴ This is not least so that there can be no question of era dating in central and western Arabia at the time. But this does seem to have existed in late Sabaeen times in south Arabia, which when introduced came together with a package of new names for months, and which involved intercalation.

¹⁵⁵ With reference to Greece and Rome, Lehoux (*Astronomy*, 97 and ch. 4, *passim*) shows that *parapegmata* were extra-calendrical tools for tracking phenomena which were not directly linked to calendars in place.

¹⁵⁶ Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, 194 ff.

The system of control over time is one that reaches politics, religion and other aspects of social life,¹⁵⁷ resulting in the regulation and relative homogenisation of 'social beats and pulsations of activity', with the social phenomena of movement, including cultic movement, being taken as points of reference. These events render astronomical time relevant once the local system of reckoning time is superseded by broader calendrical needs.¹⁵⁸ It seems that Arabian markets, and possibly the Meccan seasons of pilgrimage, were the points at which such coordination was negotiated and agreed under the term *nasī'*, usually translated as intercalation.

These considerations lead us to examine the Arab lunar-solar calendars as they relate to cultic rhythms. On this matter we have suggestive material, especially about pilgrimage at Mecca. In circumstances such as cult and the determination of its regular rhythms, time becomes the product of the act of measurement itself, rather than something waiting to be measured,¹⁵⁹ it being expressed in social rhythms. Cult introduces a qualitative, ritual weighting of certain relevant moments,¹⁶⁰ with which more abstract astronomical time reckoning needs to be coordinated. As with times determined by the heavenly bodies officiating over the rhythms of cult and thereby endowing the scatter of divine names with form and system, so also was it with time verging on the calendrical and transcending specific localities, endowing a wider remit of this scatter with a manageable degree of consistency and constancy.

But of course, the Arabs did not, as we have seen, reckon trans-local ritual time in the way described by the report related by Photius mentioned above. They worked with lunar-solar synchronisation which cannot, under the fluid social and political circumstances considered here, be expected to have been durable; formal liturgical calendars existed more stably only in more durable settings.¹⁶¹ We shall now consider this matter, using material relative to Mecca, and particularly to trans-local pilgrimage at Mecca termed *ḥajj*,¹⁶² the local Meccan rite being termed *ʿumra*,¹⁶³

¹⁵⁷ Cf. the discussion of Goody, *Logic*, 95.

¹⁵⁸ Sorokin and Merton, 'Social time', 619, 627 f., and cf. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 11.

¹⁵⁹ Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, 194. ¹⁶⁰ Cf. Sorokin and Merton, 'Social time', 622.

¹⁶¹ Such as Palmyra, for instance: Drijvers, 'Inscriptions', 118.

¹⁶² The verb *ḥj* is attested in a Safaitic inscription already with reference to pilgrimage to the shrine of Baalshamīn at Sī' in southern Syria (M. Macdonald, personal communication), and the word *ḥajja* occurred in Arabic poetry in the sense of a one-year interval: Tabrizi, *Sharb*, 124 n. 4, 141.

¹⁶³ For the purposes of the following discussion, Mecca will be taken to designate the whole area declared sacred, and not only the centre of the settlement, which was of course a set of dispersed areas of habitation rather than a town properly so called. This area was marked by the *abilla*, sg. *muhall* (*al-abilla* was also used in the sense of the time indicated by lunation: Q, 2.189, and of sacrifice: Q, 2.173), locations outside Mecca where those travelling with the intent of performing

and to considering this as a macrocosm of smaller-scale arrangements made elsewhere.

Mecca: the order of sacred time and space

In the year 10 of the Hijra, after gaining dominance over Mecca, Muḥammad is famously said to have declared that ‘time has come full circle’ (*istadār al-zamān*), and proceeded to decree the abolition of intercalating the lunar months in synchrony with the solar year, and the institution of a purely lunar system of time reckoning for his Paleo-Muslim followers.¹⁶⁴ This must be taken to indicate that this point marked the end of an intercalary cycle, with the lunar and solar months coinciding.¹⁶⁵

The precise details of intercalation (*al-nasīʿ*) are extremely confused in the sources, which tend to conceive pre-Islamic calendars, including the sequence of months, in terms of what later became the Hijri calendar,¹⁶⁶ and often tended to rationalise these old calendars in terms of astronomical and mathematical knowledge of the Abbasid era. The annual intercalation of eleven days, reported in some sources,¹⁶⁷ would yield a cycle of thirty-three years,¹⁶⁸ and seems implausible on technical grounds.¹⁶⁹ More plausible are reports of the biannual intercalations, and of a thirteenth month every three years.¹⁷⁰ But none can be considered conclusive, and the matter is further compounded by the names given to months of the lunar year, a matter already referred to. What does, however, seem to be plausible is that *al-nasīʿ* existed as a rough and episodic system of coordinating the lunar and solar years, and that this involved the occasional repetition of certain months. There is also an indication that the month of Ṣafar was also on occasion repeated, the first occurrence of which was renamed as

pilgrimage went into a state of ritual purity, *iḥrām*, and announced this by a litany of invocation. These locations are reflected in later Muslim practices and specifications of sacred boundaries outside Mecca, on which see al-ʿAynī, *ʿUmda*, 9.136 ff.

¹⁶⁴ Q, 9.36 f.; al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 125; al-Fāsī, *Shifāʾ*, 2.39 ff.; ‘Tārīkh’, *EI*, 10.260a–b; Fahd, *Divination*, 122; Wellhausen, *Reste*, 94 ff.; Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 476 n. 54. Al-Bīrūnī (*al-Āthār*, 15) gives a summary account of the intercalary cycle of thirteen years.

¹⁶⁵ This was noted by al-Suyūṭī (*al-Durr*, 3.211) and again by Sprenger (‘Kalender’, 143), later discussed by Rubin (‘Great pilgrimage’, 246), who stresses another coincidence, this time with Passover, tending overall to Judaise Meccan material unduly (*ibid.*, 243 ff., 251 f.).

¹⁶⁶ For an analysis of later Muslim traditions concerning intercalation, see Moberg, *An-Nasīʿ*, 5 ff., 10 f., and *passim*.

¹⁶⁷ More exactly, ten days and twenty-one hours, according to the calculations of al-Bīrūnī (*al-Āthār*, 11 f.).

¹⁶⁸ Sprenger, ‘Kalender’, 146. Cf. Hamidullah (‘*Nasīʿ*’, 6 f.) and also Shaikh (‘Veracity’, 48 ff., 59 ff.), who takes some uncertainties of intercalation for purely technical errors.

¹⁶⁹ Sprenger, ‘Kalender’, 146. ¹⁷⁰ Al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 1.85 f.; al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār*, 11 f., 62 f.

al-Muḥarram, possibly in the Paleo-Islamic period, or simply named as such (or as al-Aṣamm) early on.¹⁷¹

This and the various regimes described in the sources, likely to reflect a variety of usages, was of course not the measurement of time, but the indication of the next holy season, whether this should occur after twelve or after thirteen lunations, and whether it should be shifted, doubled, abrogated or postponed.¹⁷² The system's only two constants would have been the 'umra of Rajab in the spring, and the ḥajj that took place in autumn during a month which may or may not have been called Dhū'l-Ḥijja, Ṣafar I or al-Muḥarram,¹⁷³ the winter and summer months falling respectively in Jumādā I/Jumādā II and Ramaḍān/Shawwāl.¹⁷⁴ Astronomical computations in terms of the spring equinox or some other indicator cannot realistically be expected to have been involved.¹⁷⁵ It was lunations that counted, in whichever way and to whatever extent these may have been correlated with the zodiac; a Qurayshi saying seems to have associated the 'umra with Aldebaran.¹⁷⁶

Ultimately, the times thus reckoned were social times, regulating seasonal movements as indicated above, and endowing temporal coherence to the correlative timing of pilgrimage and markets. The worldly and the holy were intimately imbricated; the markets of Mijannā, Dhū'l-Majāz and 'Ukāz seem generally to have been attended in a state of *iḥrām*.¹⁷⁷ The overall effect, to return to matters discussed above, was not so much a move from mundane to sacred spaces as much as from the local to the more articulately and trans-locally Arab.¹⁷⁸ This involved decreeing certain months to have been holy and crucial, and the intercalation discussed seems to have been preoccupied chiefly with the calibration of such holy seasons according to circumstances, including adjustment to circumstances of war.¹⁷⁹ Two blocks of months were thus declared holy: three consecutive ones (*sard*)

¹⁷¹ Al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 1.88; Ibn Durayd, *al-Isḥiqāq*, 1.390; 'ḥ-r-m', *LA*; Sprenger, 'Kalender', 134; Hamidullah, 'Nasī', 4 f. The repetition of months, the intercalation of blocks of two months, and the shifting of days in between months, was not entirely peculiar to the Arabs, but practised by the Sasanians also: Bickerman, 'Time reckoning', 787.

¹⁷² Sprenger, 'Kalender', 134; Moberg, *An-Nasī*, *passim*.

¹⁷³ See Wellhausen, *Reste*, 99 f. and cf. the comments of Sprenger, 'Kalender', 156.

¹⁷⁴ Al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 1.85; Wellhausen, *Reste*, 94 f.

¹⁷⁵ As, for instance, Sprenger, 'Kalender', 142 and Hamidullah, 'Nasī', *passim*.

¹⁷⁶ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 5.53.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Rubin, 'Great pilgrimage', 253.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. similar remarks on the Olympic Truce in Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, 449, and the *theōroi*, Delphic ambassadors visiting Hellenic cities every four years (Malkin, *Greek World*, 20).

¹⁷⁹ Al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 1.88 f.; *SIH*, 1.38 f. This was not unique to the Arabs. Alexander's engagement with the forces of Darius coincided with the luni-solar month of Daesius (May–June), when Macedonian kings usually desisted from military activity, as a result of which Alexander announced the month to be a second Artimius (Plutarch, *Lives*, 143).

in autumn, these being Dhū'l-Qi'da, Dhū'l-Ḥijja and Muḥarram, and the single month of Rajab (*Rajab al-fard*) in spring.¹⁸⁰ More precisely for cultic purposes, the first decade of Dhū'l-Ḥijja was called *al-ayyām al-ma'dūdāt*, and was particularly hallowed, terminating in sacrifices offered at the end of pilgrimage, followed by *al-ayyām al-ma'lūmāt* or *ayyām al-tashriq*,¹⁸¹ a nomenclature that was to be retained in later Muslim devotions. Even more precisely, within these periods of pilgrimage, particular rites were performed at specific times, such as dawn prayers at Muzdalifa, still performed by Muḥammad, moving from 'Arafa to Minā (*ifāda*) after the sun had risen,¹⁸² or stoning on the day of proceeding away from Minā after the midday sun.¹⁸³ The Ka'ba itself was reported to have been open on Mondays and Thursdays.¹⁸⁴

Clearly, all this required some form of regulation and modalities of control. The *nasī'* itself seems to have been subject to the adjudication of the B. Faqīm of Kināna or B. Mālik b. Kināna, the mother tribe of Quraysh, according to genealogists, and Quraysh's allies, who declared the coming year's schedule in the autumn, after the pilgrimage. It is said that the arrangement was made by a figure with the obscure name al-Qalammas.¹⁸⁵ But it must be noted that not all holy months were observed by everyone.¹⁸⁶ Observance was related to membership of specific cultic associations, and each of these had a separate social and regional constituency, and performed its rites at different locations, even in the Mecca area. Some, such as Ṭay', Khath'am and some sections of the B. Asad, were beyond this crucial system altogether.¹⁸⁷ That cultic associations also doubled up as systems of alliance and commercial partnership is evident.

The cultic associations making pilgrimage to the Meccan area were two. Al-Ḥums are reported to have gathered together Quraysh, Thaḳīf, Khuzā'a and Kināna, and possibly B. 'Amir b. Ṣaṣa'a of Hawāzin, sections

¹⁸⁰ 'h-r-m', *LA*; Sprenger, 'Kalender', 157; Wellhausen, *Reste*, 99 f.

¹⁸¹ Q, 2.203, 89.1–4, although there seems to be some terminological confusion regarding this nomenclature (al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 1.223). See Forcada, 'Cycle lunaire', 70. On possible interpretations of the obscure term *tashriq*, al-Mas'ūdi, *Murūj*, § 1309.

¹⁸² Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 2.202, 204. Muḥammad preferred to make the *ifāda* before sunrise. His ritual modifications will be discussed in some detail in the next chapter.

¹⁸³ *SIH*, 1.III. ¹⁸⁴ *SIH*, 3.144 f.

¹⁸⁵ Al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 1.88; *SIH*, 1.38 f.; TAB, 316. al-Bīrūnī (*al-Āthār*, 15) was not the only one to hold that this skill was learnt from the Jews, an assertion commonly accepted uncritically. The system was too complex to admit of simple ascription to this or that influence, or for this obscure name to be considered etymologically with a view to showing such a connection. See the critical remarks of Rodinson, 'Espace', 52.

¹⁸⁶ This had already been noted by Sprenger ('Kalender', 157), but is only rarely indicated; still less are consequences drawn from it for our overall picture of Arabian religion.

¹⁸⁷ Al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 2.166.

of Kalb (including Zuhayr b. Janāb mentioned above in connection with the suppression of another *ḥaram*) and Māzin, groups located on the route between Mecca and Yemen, to the north-east of Mecca and along the road to al-Ḥīra, and along the route to Syria.¹⁸⁸ The Ḥilla comprised, among others, Tamīm (with the exception of one section, B. Yarbū', who belonged to the Ḥums), Rabī'a (except Janāb and 'Ilāf), sections of Māzin, Ḍabba, Ṭay', Asad, Hudhayl, Bakr b. 'Abd Manāt, Khath'am and Qays 'Aylān (with the exception of Thaḳīf who, as mentioned above, were overwhelmed by Quraysh and joined the Ḥums), 'Udwān and 'Āmir b. Ṣa'ṣa'a.¹⁸⁹ Each of these two associations was said to have constituted a separate *dīn*, and to have entertained chronic enmity – *dīn*, on evidence of usage in poetry, refers most straightforwardly to the performance of cultic ritual, and in one text to pilgrimage.¹⁹⁰ The statement that the Ḥilla did not recognise the Meccan crucial months may have been true for Hudhayl, but cannot have applied to others.¹⁹¹ Finally, the Ṭuls, largely Yemenite but also including Iyād b. Nizār, 'Akk and others, were a particular constituency that performed the same rites as the Ḥums.¹⁹² The fact that rites performed together betokened a form of alliance is particularly clearly illustrated by the fact that, when Muḥammad performed the *'umra* and its associated sacrifices, those who participated in the rites with him but had not been present at al-Ḥudaybiyya when he was given allegiance were barred from offering sacrifices.¹⁹³

Meccan space and ritual order

There is of course a most interesting social, political and cultic geography yet to be studied with reference to the above cultic associations, which probably reflect the situation as it existed around the end of the sixth century. These associations performed rites following different and sometimes overlapping itineraries, each betokening some form of territorial privileges permanent or temporary, with overall adjudication likely to have been in the hands of Quraysh, but in association with Thaḳīf, of whom a number of individuals are named in the sources as having been in charge of specific functions, such as *ifāda*, and of Ṣulṣul b. Aws b. Mujāshin having been

¹⁸⁸ See the review of the material in Kister, 'Mecca and Tamīm', 132 ff.

¹⁸⁹ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 179; *al-Munammaq*, 280 f.; Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, 1.176.

¹⁹⁰ Abū Raḥma, 'Qirā'a', 111 f.

¹⁹¹ Al-Jāhiz, *al-Ḥayawān*, 7.216 f., and cf. Kister, 'Mecca and Tamīm', 131 ff.

¹⁹² Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 179 f. There are some confused accounts of Ḥimyarite cultic involvement with the Ka'ba: *SII*, 1.20; *TAB*, 254.

¹⁹³ *WAQ*, 736.

in overall charge of the pilgrimage season¹⁹⁴ – when, we have no way of telling.

Four different locations were involved: ‘Arafa (or ‘Arafāt), al-Muzdalifa, Minā and central Mecca, comprising the Ka‘ba along with al-Marwa and al-Ṣafā.¹⁹⁵ The first two stations involved *wuqūf*, standing in adoration, most likely to have involved worship of sacred sites and of idols,¹⁹⁶ and, at the second, sacrifice or at least the consecration of animals (*ish‘ār*, scarifying the right side of the back or the hump of the animal – the ritual location for this was also called *al-mash‘ar*) to be sacrificed at Minā,¹⁹⁷ and very likely worship at the top of Jabal Quzaḥ nearby, where fires were lit during the holy season.¹⁹⁸ It is indicative of the evolution of Paleo-Islam that this term, lexically over-determined by reference to location, was to become, as *sha‘ā’ir*, the term of preference for ‘ritual’. Procession from the one to the other, and from the second further along the line connecting the location with Mecca, was termed respectively *ijāza* and *ifāda*, betokening spatial translation, the latter taking place before sunset,¹⁹⁹ and in all cases moving towards an idol or idols.²⁰⁰ Minā was a sacrificial site, probably before idols, and a slight way further along the road to inner Mecca lay sites of lapidation, still used by Muslims today.²⁰¹ Nearer the centre of Mecca where the Ka‘ba was located was al-Ḥajūn, which may have had cultic significance or was the place of specific rites, as suggested by a poem by al-A‘shā.²⁰²

Finally, at the centre of Mecca lay the Ka‘ba, reportedly housing the idol of Hubal, surrounded by other idols and betyls. It also housed the Black

¹⁹⁴ Al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 2.165, 166, 170; Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 181.

¹⁹⁵ Both names refer lexically to stones: the former to *al-summar*, flint stones, the latter to particularly hard rock: Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishtiqāq*, 76, 128. Hurrying along between them, termed *tawāf* and not *sa‘ī* (the latter does not occur in the Qur‘ān either) is explicitly mentioned in one *talbiya* text: Abū Rahma, ‘Qirā‘a’, 106 f.

¹⁹⁶ There is no detail on this, and speculation about the ‘nature’ of the divinity or divinities there resident (for instance, von Grunebaum, *Festivals*, 35) does not help with clarification.

¹⁹⁷ The precise sacrificial location is somewhat obscure, and the various reports are uncertain: Sufyān al-Thawrī, *Tafsīr*, 25 n. 1.

¹⁹⁸ Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1.54, where the introduction of fire was attributed to Quṣayy, and was, according to al-Wāqidi, still maintained during the holy season until his own day (WAQ, 1078). Wellhausen (*Reste*, 61) maintains that Quzaḥ was worshipped there, and that he was a god of storms, thunder and lightning. See the comments of Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Pèlerinage*, 260, 260 n. 3.

¹⁹⁹ Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, 1.175.

²⁰⁰ Q, 70.43 uses the present participle *yūfīdūn* almost terminologically to designate movement towards idols, in association with a prompt pace – Q, 2.198 f. prescribes praise of and supplication to Allāh during *ifāda*; cf. ‘f-y-d’, *LA*.

²⁰¹ ‘Abbās, ‘Naṣṣān’, 29 f. This is a very obscure rite, of which there are parallels elsewhere: Fehling, *Überlegungen*, 69 ff.

²⁰² Al-A‘shā, *Dīwān*, 15.35.

Stone in its south-south-east corner, and quite likely another black stone in the opposite corner.²⁰³ Close by lay the idols of Isāf and Nā'ila,²⁰⁴ which were particularly important as they were associated with Qurayshi sacrifices that involved a *talbiya* specifically directed at Isāf;²⁰⁵ they are likely to have been the original deities of Quraysh, brought by them from their erstwhile territories and worshipped continually along with the regnant deities of Mecca and its environs, including al-'Uzzā. Nearby was a betyl later termed Maqām Ibrāhīm,²⁰⁶ al-Hijr, most probably a pen for consecrated animals,²⁰⁷ and the well of Zamzam, intimately associated with ritual.²⁰⁸ To the east of the Ka'ba lay a straight concourse between al-Marwa and al-Ṣafā, each abutting a hill at which sacrifices were offered, one with the name Muṭ'im al-Ṭayr (the bird's talons),²⁰⁹ suggestive of sacrifice, the other called Mujāwir al-Riḥ. Throughout, one would expect the presence of permanent or mobile altars, locations for votive offerings, water basins for ablutions, and incense burners.²¹⁰

Mujāwir al-Riḥ led on up to the hallowed Jabal Abū Qubays, from where it is reported, not implausibly, that the Black Stone had originally come, and where it had been held for safety at times of flash-flooding.²¹¹ It may well be the case that the Black Stone was incorporated into the corner of the Ka'ba, either from some other location nearby or from Jabal Abū

²⁰³ There is much legendary material about the Black Stone, it having been a stone from heaven or a jewel from heaven, become black by the impurities of heathenism, menstruation and other manners of pollution: *SIH*, §§ 81 ff.; al-Azraqi, *Makka*, 32, 227.

²⁰⁴ There is much interesting legendary material about these idols, including the Euhemeristic story that they had been humans who, having fornicated inside the Ka'ba, were turned to stone – see the accounts in 'Ajīna, *Mawsū'a*, 1.246 f. They were thought by some to have originally been located at Zamzam and at the Ka'ba; another account claims they had originally been located at al-Ṣafā and al-Marwā, and a third reports that they had originally been nearer the Red Sea, later taken to Mecca: Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 1.235 f.; al-Tlilī, 'Isāf wa Nā'ila', 2, 4 f., 9; Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Pèlerinage*, 233. If the last report were accepted, it would make sense in the context of the formation of Quraysh from Kinānite groups originating to the west of Mecca. Whatever the truth of the matter, much turmoil and movement in the religious life of Mecca is suggested. Gaudefroy-Demombynes (*Pèlerinage*, 305 ff) has suggested that the legend of Isāf and Nā'ila may have had some connection with prostitution available during the holy seasons, although, unlike Gaudefroy-Demombynes (*Mahomet*, 629), one must be wary of speaking of hierodules.

²⁰⁵ *SIH*, 1.101; Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 311. ²⁰⁶ Cf. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Pèlerinage*, 108.

²⁰⁷ A Sabaic inscription declaring the dedication of land to a deity on which animals would roam free refers to this land as *mḥgr*: Frantsouzoff, 'Sacred pastures', 155.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Tabrizi, *Sharḥ*, 284 n. 51.

²⁰⁹ Ibn Durayd (*al-Ishṭiqāq*, 88) indicated the feminine form *muṭ'ima*.

²¹⁰ One would expect that altars and water basins elsewhere might provide indirect indications of their existence in Mecca – see *Routes d'Arabie*, nos. 138–46 (altars at Qaryat al-Fāw), 142–6 (incense burners at Qaryat al-Fāw); al-Anṣārī, *al-Ḥaḍāra*, 87 (water basin at al-Khurayba).

²¹¹ Al-Fakihi, *Akhbār Makka*, § 13; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 1.163, and also 1.102 where it is suggested that canopies for ritual were set upon it, giving it the appearance of a tabernacle – and that it was there that Adam discovered how to make a fire with flints.

Qubays, during Muḥammad's lifetime. Interestingly, the term *Ka'batan* in Sabaic denoted a stone plinth or a carved stone massif, for cultic use. One plausible report states that,²¹² until then, the Ka'ba had consisted of a cairn, *raḍma* (or *raḍama*),²¹³ to the height of a man, which may have been either a large, flat rock or a cairn made of large rocks, and have operated as the sanctum of a temple. At an opportune moment (reputedly, but possibly as an aetiological legend, the sudden availability of timber from a ship-wreck at Jidda), Quraysh decided to replace it with the cubical wooden structure known to posterity, or, in another version, to cover it with a cubical structure made of wood. It is also reported that when this was completed, it was Muḥammad who was chosen to set the Black Stone in its corner. The Black Stone had therefore not previously formed part of the Ka'ba structure.²¹⁴ This construction involving Muḥammad in some way is set some fifteen years before his Prophecy.²¹⁵ There is of course no way of knowing if the name Ka'ba was used before the cubical structure was erected,²¹⁶ although epigraphic evidence shows a temple at Najrān vocalised as *k'batān, the Arabic *ʾayn* being weakly articulated in south Arabia.²¹⁷

All of this is most interesting, and would convey, again, the image of a situation which saw much change and exchange of deities and of the forms in which they were worshipped.²¹⁸ If we were also to consider legends of the digging of the well of Zamzam, which associate this with the time of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib,²¹⁹ the cumulative picture would be one of a relatively late organisation of Meccan rites and ritual facilities that would be in keeping with the above discussion of the Hijāz in relation to the history of Arabia,²²⁰ and may well have marked the foundation of the Ḥums cultic association.

²¹² *SIH*, 1.178 ff; *TAB*, 320 ff.

²¹³ On which: 'r-ḍ-m', *LA*, which mentions this matter specifically.

²¹⁴ Al-Fākihī, *Akhbār Makka*, § 13. ²¹⁵ *US*, II.

²¹⁶ A cubical structure is the only possible meaning of *ka'ba* in Arabic: 'k-'-b', *LA*.

²¹⁷ Robin ('Nagrān', 52), who discusses the religious setting overall (62 ff.). King ('Alignments', 306 f., 309), building upon calculations of medieval Arabic geodesy as well as modern knowledge, found that neither the sides nor the angles of the Ka'ba are aligned to the cardinal points, but that the east-facing and south-facing sides are aligned, respectively, to receive the *qabūl* and *janūb* winds, corresponding respectively with sunrise at the summer solstice and the rising of Canopus. This alignment may not have been entirely fortuitous or accidental. It does seem overall that there was a predilection for directing prayers to the east, with parallels in Yemen, Nabataea and elsewhere, and it is sometimes supposed that Meccan houses opened eastwards. But there seems to have been no special function or regard for the eastern face, and the more promising symbolic item would have been the Black Stone: placed at the south-east corner, it faced the rain-bringing wind associated with Canopus rising.

²¹⁸ Cf. Fahd, *Panthéon*, 203 ff. and Rubin, 'Ḥanīfiyya', 97 ff.

²¹⁹ See the full account in *SH*, 1.46 ff.

²²⁰ See the chronological comment in Rubin, 'Ḥanīfiyya', 101 n. 16.

As for movement in space, it is well known that the Ka'ba was circumambulated counter-clockwise seven times, a phenomenon not altogether unfamiliar in the history of religions. The space between al-Marwā and al-Ṣafā was a course for rapid procession, seven times (*sa'ī*, but the term *ṭawāf*, used for circumambulation, was the common term).²²¹ Still, it is difficult to reconstruct the actual spatial course and ritual order of pre-Islamic pilgrimage at Mecca through the fog of later Muslim legal elaborations, retrojections and redactions.²²² But it is not impossible. We do know that there were two separate rites at Mecca,²²³ the *ḥajj* of the Ḥilla in early autumn involving the translation from 'Arafa to Minā through al-Muzdalifa, and the spring *'umra* of the Ḥums and the Ṭuls involving rites at the Ka'ba area and between and at al-Marwā and al-Ṣafā, with rites at al-Muzdalifa, although the latter seem also to have taken place at the time of the *ḥajj*.²²⁴ The Ḥums emphatically avoided rites at 'Arafa.²²⁵ We also know that the Ḥilla did perform rites at the inner Meccan sites as well. The itineraries seem fairly well established, but the order of movement is obscure, except for the 'Arafa/Minā/al-Muzdalifa itinerary. Quraysh and the Ḥums are reported to have had their own point of *ifāda* at al-Muzdalifa/Jam'.²²⁶

But in all cases, the relationship between these movements, the sense and direction of movements and rites at and around the Ka'ba remain obscure and enfolded into what later became the Muslim rite, as does the precise timing of Ḥilla rites around the Ka'ba and at al-Marwa/al-Ṣafa. The station at al-Muzdalifa seems also to have been imposed by the Ḥums upon others at a recent date, prior to which procession from 'Arafa had not led to al-Muzdalifa.²²⁷ What does seem to have been the case, if we were

²²¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 2.193, 194, 195. See also Hamidullah, 'City-state', 324.

²²² 'Pilgrimage', *EQ*, 4.91–100. It is useful to note that, just as the *Sīra* of Muḥammad is not a work of exegesis, so also can it be maintained that not all accounts of the pre-Islamic pilgrimage at Mecca, or of Arab polytheism more broadly considered, should be taken to have been merely legal, pietistic or polemical elaborations. Accounts of polytheism as *shirk* in Arabic historical and Muslim religious traditions do display certain concordances with late antique critiques of *idololatreia* (Hawting, *Idolary*, 69 f., 74 ff.). But no measure of philological contrivance or interpretative tendentiousness, or arguments from silence, as in *ibid.*, 45 ff., 53 f., 57 ff., 61, 63, can demonstrate that the Qur'ānic and later Muslim writings on idolatry were directed at anything but Arab polytheists. These accounts were often animated by the austere pleasures of antiquarianist curiosity, themselves related to broader habits of work discipline. A manful attempt at reconstructing the pre-Islamic pilgrimage rites, conjecturally as the author asserts, was undertaken more than a century ago by Lenormant, 'Culte payen', 323. Gaudefroy-Demombynes (*Pèlerinage*) offers the fullest and most detailed attempt to do this to date.

²²³ See the discussion of Ju'ayt, *Sīra*, 2.104 ff. ²²⁴ US, § 9; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 4.621.

²²⁵ *SIH*, 1.184 f.; Mujāhid, *Tafsīr*, § 96. ²²⁶ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 2.200.

²²⁷ Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 4.621.

to be led by indications relating to worshippers of Manāt – the Medinan Aws, Khazraj, in addition to Ghassān (most likely the Medina section), Hudhayl and Ghaṭafān – is that deities were worshipped after the *wuqūf* at ‘Arafa (perhaps a night vigil), and that, for these groups, desacralisation occurred after sacrifices of their hair to their tutelary deity at al-Mushallal or at Qudayd, rather than after the *sa‘ī*.²²⁸

The two ceremonies of *ḥajj* and *‘umra* were separate, as to both their constituencies and their timing. A report, indicative irrespective of its truth, suggests that Muḥammad’s irenical interests were early; when he was spotted at the station of ‘Arafa while still a pagan, surprise was expressed that a member of the Ḥums should be performing rites at that place.²²⁹ Poems clearly indicate that the Ḥums performed rites related to two angles of the Ka‘ba, the Black Stone and the opposite angle, and at the Maqām.²³⁰ The poet al-A‘shā places together as a group rites at al-Ḥajūn, al-Ṣafā and Ajyād (to the west of the latter), and drinking the holy water of Zamzam.²³¹ Clearly, there were rites, and orders of rites, at locations, probably inhabited by betyls or idols, which had been excised from memory early on. The *sa‘ī* and the worship of the two stones at opposite angles of the Ka‘ba appear strangely to have been actually barred to Hudhayl, as they performed both the *ḥajj* and the *‘umra*,²³² which would then convey, hyperbole notwithstanding, a pernickety approach to rights and privileges; punctiliousness is of the very essence of ritual.

The ritual observances of the Ḥilla at the centre of Mecca appear to have taken place under Qurayshi auspices and under conditions of ritual purity imposed by the Ḥums. Each Ḥilla pilgrim was associated with a *ḥurmī*, who provided him or her with garments in which to perform circumambulation unless they preferred to perform this rite in the nude, which some did; their own clothes were inadmissible.²³³ Women had a special dispensation in this matter, but they were disallowed from wearing sewn or buttoned garments. The Ḥilla were not allowed to bring their own food with them, but had to consume what was made available to them there. Finally, they were barred from dwelling in tents, but were required to stay under canopies of hide or leather.

But the control by Quraysh was not total. Procession from ‘Arafa (*ijāza*) seems to have been led by persons belonging to the section of Ṣafwān b.

²²⁸ *SII*, § 96; *SH*, 3.368; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 2.193 ff., 3.7; Wellhausen, *Reste*, 25 f.

²²⁹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 2.199. ²³⁰ *AGH*, 17.207 f. ²³¹ Al-A‘shā, *Dīwān*, 15.25 f.

²³² Ḥassān b. Thābit, *Dīwān*, 68.2, and cf. Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 107.

²³³ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 181.

Shijna of the distant Tamīm,²³⁴ and procession from al-Muzdalifa under a section of the B. ‘Udwan of Qays ‘Aylān, with the leader mounted on an ass.²³⁵ The former, of the Sa’d b. Zayd Manāt section, seem on this score to have had a prominence sufficient for Imru’ al-Qays to praise ‘Uwayr b. Shijna, the uncle of one Karib b. Ṣafwān who seems to have continued fulfilling this role, possibly, but perhaps anachronistically, into the lifetime of Muḥammad.²³⁶ The dwellings of Ṣafwān b. Shijna seem indeterminate, which does not help much in reconstructing the parameters of this role of theirs. They were of the Daws of al-Azd, and are said to have dwelt in the Tihāma following their ejection from al-Ṭā’if by Thaḳīf,²³⁷ again without specification sufficient for attempting a socio-geographic reconstruction.

These and similar indicators would need to be brought together in terms of an analysis of socio-political and socio-geographical systems of control of the Meccan pilgrimages; one needs also to factor in indications that a variety of sections that performed cultic and quasi-priestly roles may have been relatively isolated from more hegemonic sections.²³⁸ One superintendent (*sādin*) of the Meccan Ka’ba was identified as a client (*mawlā*) of Persian origin of B. ‘Abd al-Dār.²³⁹ Until such an analysis is attempted properly it is not possible to reach any conclusions of relevance, barring general impressions that one would gain from the plentiful reports available about persons or sections of Quraysh controlling supplies of food and water, offering hospitality and largesse (called *rifāda*) which, we have seen, would be expected of chiefs,²⁴⁰ and connecting the end of pilgrimage processions with the further translations to the seasonal markets in the region.

Many of these services doubtless doubled up as gainful activities. The pilgrimage ceremonies were clamorous affairs, with the pilgrims clapping their hands and sounding off as they processed, much to the scathing disdain of the Qur’ān, where these sounds were likened to the whistling twitter of the *mukkā*’ bird (Q, 8.35: *mukā^{un} wa-taṣḍiya^{un}*).²⁴¹ On poetic

²³⁴ As it is well known that tribal units operated on the ground as sections rather than large-scale tribes, it would seem to be somewhat misleading to state that pilgrimage at ‘Arafa was ‘in the hands of Tamīm’ (Wellhausen, *Reste*, 83, enthusiastically endorsed by Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 172, 176).

²³⁵ *SIH*, 1.112 f; Yāqūt, *Mu’jam*, 4.624. ²³⁶ Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamhara*, 1.92, 97.

²³⁷ Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamhara*, 1.106; al-Qalqashandī, *Nihāya*, § 1275.

²³⁸ Sa’id, *al-Nasab*, 138. ²³⁹ *AGH*, 1.245.

²⁴⁰ Thus, for instance, al-Muṭ’im b. ‘Adī, whose name, ‘Provider’, was signalled above, was lauded as ‘‘aẓīm al-mash’arayn’ (Ḥassan b. Thābit, *Dīwān*, 1.14), and Abū Ṭālib is said to have been addressed as the son of the feeder of birds (‘muṭ’in al-tayr’, the other meaning of this appellation encountered above, implying plentiful sacrificial offers from which both men and birds were fed) and supplier of water to pilgrims (al-Ya’qūbī, *Tārikh*, 2.15 f.).

²⁴¹ Yāqūt, *Mu’jam*, 4.616.

evidence, one swore by the Lord of those dancing towards Minā.²⁴² Wine was available after the *ifāda*, and Muḥammad himself partook of this;²⁴³ his uncle, al-‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib supplied a raisin liquor from al-Ṭā’if, mixed with Zamzam water and served, along with gruel, in a special *qubba*. Liquor may also have been available during the days of *tashrīq*, one interpretation of which was that pilgrims, after Minā, proceeded to *al-mashārīq*, where they are said to have prayed,²⁴⁴ but possibly also to have frolicked.²⁴⁵ Correlative with desacralisation and the frolicsome mood following this station, it is likely that prostitution was available, formally known to Muslim sources as *mut‘at al-nisā’*, known in Western languages as ‘temporary marriage’.²⁴⁶

Cultic religion and fleeting energies

Mecca was also a federated expression of broader Arabian religious phenomena, illustrating these in a specific form of arrangements regarding the structured times, spaces and social conditions of cultic practice, endowing a more accessible and relatively better-known structure to cults offered to the scatter and profusion of divine names.

A closer look will now be taken at the commonalities of Arab religion which, it is maintained, constituted a cluster of local cultic practices with little if anything by way of extra-cultic elaboration in terms of myth or of theology.

As already argued, cultic ritual occurs at the zero degree of signification. Little beyond cultic association, an eminently social fact, existed by which one religion may be defined and distinguished from another. It was not the deity worshipped that defined a religion, deities being primarily bound to localities and to social groups, but translatable nevertheless and not unique. This is the sense of the poet ‘Amr b. Qamī’a’s line asserting similarity of

²⁴² Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 108, the dancers occurring in the feminine gender. See the comments of Lammens, ‘Culte’, 64; the author expected that women played tambourines as well.

²⁴³ Al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 295 f., 299. For poetic evidence, al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Uṣṭūra*, 236 f.

²⁴⁴ Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, § 1309.

²⁴⁵ Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Mahomet*, 563.

²⁴⁶ This was already noted by Nöldeke (Review of Robertson-Smith, *Kinship and Marriage*, 155). Given the sanitisation performed by Muslim sources, it is extremely difficult to reach a conclusive connection between *mut‘at an-nisā’* and *mut‘at al-ḥajj*: the latter refers to combining the *ḥajj* and the *‘umra*, and the former, against a consideration of flour and dates, was practised well into the time of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. The two are confused in the sources, but of course ‘temporary marriage’ has an interesting history of both permission and prohibition by Muḥammad himself. It is sanctioned by the Qur’ān at Q. 4.24 (which also refers at Q. 2.196 to *mut‘at al-ḥajj*, which can be interpreted in a similar, unsublimated sense) and still admitted by Shī’a according to this and to the sanction of Prophetic example as expressed in tradition. See Gribetz, *Strange Bedfellows*, 11 ff., 23 ff., 41 ff., 75 f., 183, and Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Pèlerinage*, 305 ff. and *Mahomet*, 629 f.

religion, using the word *dīn*, provided that sacrificial slaughter (*nusuk*) were properly performed (*insāk*).²⁴⁷ This involved *afrā'*, the first-born animals being sacrificed, *a'rāf*, physical marks of consecration, and the acts of slaughtering (*nusuk*, *nasīka*) the sacrificial animal (*dhabīh*), together, one would assume, with specifications of space and time. A crisper statement of the sense of distinctions within cultic religion at the point of application, in terms of the narcissism of small differences, is hard to find. Crucially, localisation acquires a capital importance, as it is primarily related to specific social settings, and consequently to cult at the point of application.

Elusive energies

It is useful at the outset to observe the diffuse and ubiquitous phenomenon of the impersonal world animated by uncanny creatures generally known as demons, a world which endows the physical features of inner Arabia with life, and inhabits its elements, animate and inanimate. This is not necessarily to speak in terms of a pandaemonic stage in religious history that preceded the elevation of non-specific spirits to the level of personal deities,²⁴⁸ or to assume that the belief in demons was in some way one that was particularly characteristic of nomads; we shall simply be moving from the more general and generic to the more specific. The very notion of daemonism is one of divinity with a negative charge. The assumption that there was a continuum between deities and demons is incontestable, but needs to be considered in ways other than those based on an assumption of an upward linear development.²⁴⁹

Wellhausen was, with some slight reservation, perfectly right in his view that demons, the *jinn*, constituted a general species rather than a group of individual personalities. He was correct in bringing this matter into contrast with cult, which individualises and names its object, and, finally, in holding that a characteristic feature arising from the foregoing is that

²⁴⁷ *Wa innī arā dīnī yuwāfiqū dīnahun^u /idhā ansakū afrā'ahā wa dhabīhahā*: 'Amr b. Qamī'a, *Dīwān*, 2.9. Farrukh (*Frühislam*, 87) has *a'rāf* instead of *afrā'*, which might be interpreted by poetic licence as animals bearing marks of consecration. See 'n-s-k' and '-r-f', *LA*, and 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.200 f. The rendering of *nusuk* as 'prostration' (Kister, 'Labbayka', text no. 31) does not seem justified, although the plural *manāsik*, and more unusually the singular, came in Islamic times to take on the general sense of 'rites' (Khan, *Exegetischen Teile*, 296). More commonly, *ish'ār* was used for marking the sacrificial victim, *i'raf* conveying more generally the act of marking something, as in branding, *wasm*.

²⁴⁸ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 213.

²⁴⁹ Henninger ('Geistesglaube', 304 ff., 315 ff.) does not admit such development, yet asserts, somewhat incongruously, the constant presence of a 'proto-Semitic El' preceding polytheism, hovering overhead.

of a religion without theology.²⁵⁰ Further, he maintained that both objects of cultic worship and conceptions of demons arose from an underlying animism, in a process crucially concretised by location, and that the *jinn*, albeit not flesh and blood, were yet not extra-mundane beings.²⁵¹

Like that of many others, the Arabs' was an enchanted world, open to transfers between the seen and the unseen, and to the transmogrification and transfiguration of things that we regard as natural. On the *jinn* there is much material, some contemporary with the situation under discussion, some noted by later antiquarians and folklorists recording a lore that persisted and still does; belief in *jinn* was preserved almost wholesale in Islam, both popular and learned.²⁵² Though generically bereft of specific personalities, the *jinn* could nevertheless be individualised, though this seems to have applied only to those related to certain individual humans whose familiars they were (*qarīn* and *ṣāḥib*, inspiring doubles, *ra'īy*, associated with apparition, *shayṭān*).²⁵³ It has been suggested, based on some current beliefs seen as persistences, that every individual had such a *Doppelgänger*.²⁵⁴ They were involved in madness, *jinna* or 'injunction' by a jinnic 'touch', *mass*,²⁵⁵ although we curiously have precious little material on exorcism, except for the report that Quraysh suggested to Muḥammad that they would have him exorcised were he to be possessed.²⁵⁶ It would not be too far-fetched to presume that propitiatory sacrifice to the *jinn* may have followed exorcism. Both Christianity and Judaism, Hellenistic and Talmudic, had developed a variety of exorcism techniques and an elaborate daemonology; and so did the Persians.²⁵⁷ But it seems that polytheistic Arabs had lived with the *jinn* in a continuum of familiarity, and in many instances of conviviality, at the distance prescribed by the notions of the *ṣāḥib* and the *qarīn* which may well have mitigated the social consequences of innjinnated possession.

²⁵⁰ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 213.

²⁵¹ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 212, 149. At *ibid.*, 209, 211, he asserts, somewhat polemically, the terrestrial character of Arab gods, contrasting them to astral divinities.

²⁵² The lore of the *jinn* is conveniently assembled in 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.705 ff.; in shorter compass, Henninger, 'Geistesglaube', 298 ff. See 'Ajīna, *Asāṭīr*, 2.13 ff., and Wellhausen, *Reste*, 148 ff. It was the subject of a synoptic poetical composition by a certain al-Ḥakam b. 'Amr al-Bahrānī, whose 41-line poem as quoted by al-Jāḥiẓ was republished with detailed lexical explanation by 'Alwān, *Mu'taqadāt* (text at 13 ff.).

²⁵³ This last word seems to have been Ge'ez originally: Kropp, 'Beyond single words'. *Ra'īy* appears in Syriac with the meaning 'Seer': Baršūm, 'al-Alfāz', (1950), 163. Uncommonly, the word *ra'ība* is used to refer to *jinn* who inform a human about distant happenings (*AGH*, 11.59).

²⁵⁴ Henninger, 'Gesitesglaube', 302.

²⁵⁵ Attested in Q, 2.275.

²⁵⁶ *SII*, § 254.

²⁵⁷ Vermes, *Jesus*, 'Demons' and 'Exorcism' in Index; Colpe, 'Geister', 585 ff., 626 ff.

The *jinn* provided inspiration and prophetic gifts to clairvoyants known as *kuhhān* (sg. *kāhin*) or *‘arrāfun* (sg. *‘arrāf*), the latter of whom were, in this capacity, also known as *matbū*, ‘one accompanied’.²⁵⁸ Among others, such beliefs were expressed in reports of a certain Fāṭima Umm al-Nu‘mān b. ‘Amr, reportedly, for Muslim authors, a prostitute, who had such a follower or *tābi* with whom she had sexual intercourse, and of another, Jatīma, whose lustful approaches were spurned when her *tābi* advised her that Muḥammad had proscribed illegitimate unions.²⁵⁹ It appears as a matter of fact from what the sources related about these *kuhhān* that they tended to be persons distinguished by various marks of social and physical marginality, including physical deformity,²⁶⁰ and performed their preternatural capacities (in addition to medical and tracking services)²⁶¹ against a consideration known as *ḥulwān*.²⁶² But this does not seem to have applied as a general rule, and we do have reports that some did belong to important lineages, played military roles²⁶³ and performed a function of adjudication, including trial by ordeal, being then designated as *tāghūt*.²⁶⁴

As would be expected, the *jinn* also provided poetical inspiration.²⁶⁵ Poetry and prophecy have a long history of association. Suwayd b. Kāhil al-Yashkurī, a poet who straddled Paleo-Islam and polytheism, invoked his familiar for inspiration when in need.²⁶⁶ The illustrious poet al-A‘shā’s familiar demon was identified as *Mishal*,²⁶⁷ and that of the Muslim

²⁵⁸ ‘t-b-’, *LA*; ‘kāhin’, *Et*; al-Damīrī, *al-Hayawān*, 1.266 f.; cf. Fahd, *Divination*, 91 ff.; Eichler, *Dschinn*, 35 ff.; ‘Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.755 ff. According to later terminology, the *‘arrāf* was defined as a clairvoyant who read natural signs and indices without preternatural help: ‘Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.772 ff.

²⁵⁹ *SII*, §§ 120, 122; *SH*, 1.288.

²⁶⁰ As for example Sawdā’ bint Zuhra of the Quraysh (Ibn Sa‘īd, *Nashwa*, 1.367), and, most famously, the bizarre Shiqq, who is said to have had the body of half a man.

²⁶¹ *AGH*, 21.108, 24.84.

²⁶² *WAQ*, 864. The interesting point has been made by Ettinghausen (*Polemik*, 27) that, in the second Meccan period of the Qur’ān, the theme of reward, *ajr*, was introduced to distinguish Muḥammad from the *kuhhān*, defending him against charges that he sought such a reward. See also ‘Reward and punishment’, *EQ*, 4.452.

²⁶³ For instance, ‘Amr b. al-Ju‘ayd of ‘Abd al-Qays, active during the Second Day of al-Kilāb: *AGH*, 16.229.

²⁶⁴ Serjeant, ‘Prose’, 124, building on al-Ṭabarī’s exegesis.

²⁶⁵ On this matter, which some scholars discount as poetical fancy and irony, see al-Jāhiz, *al-Hayawān*, 6.164 ff., 225 ff.; ‘Abd al-Raḥīm, *Adab al-jinn*, ch. 3. Ḥamīda (*Shayātīn*) assembled the material available in the sources.

²⁶⁶ *Al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, 40.104 f. (Suwayd b. Abī Kāhil al-Yashkurī, d. c. 680).

²⁶⁷ Al-A‘shā, *Dīwān*, 15.43, 33.32; *AGH*, 9.117. *Mishal* is a word that was applied metonymically to the wild ass, on account of this animal’s peculiar braying called *saḥīl* (Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishtiqāq*, 527).

al-Farazdaq (d. c. 728–730) was ‘Amr;²⁶⁸ the later poet Bashshār b. Burd was inspired by a certain al-Shiniqqāq.²⁶⁹ As to Muḥammad, he also had a deceitful familiar identified as al-Rayy (or alternatively the benign al-Abyaḍ, who was made by Muslim traditions to be associated with all prophets), who was said to have been pushed aside physically by Gabriel when he contrived to appear in Gabriel’s form, a story that may betoken the evolution of Muḥammad’s conception of inspiration, discussed later. Muḥammad’s panegyrist, Ḥassān b. Thābit, was himself inspired by a demon in the terrible form of a *sil’āt*, who during his childhood prophesied that he would become a great poet,²⁷⁰ and Ḥassān himself asserted that the *jinn* do ‘weave’ poetry.²⁷¹ Unsurprisingly, it was believed that, after his unsuccessful mission to win over al-Ṭā’if to his cause, Muḥammad visited the cultic location of Nakhla, there to receive the conversion of seven *jinn* identified by name.²⁷²

Moreover, in the regions of inner Arabia, various desolate places were regarded as privileged domains of these uncanny forces; specific areas are mentioned as being particularly favoured by these flighty beings.²⁷³ Wādī ‘Abqar (variously placed in Najd or in the vicinity of Mecca), as well as al-Baddā’ and Wādī al-Baqqār, both in the vicinity of Tabūk, were famously inhabited by the *jinn*.²⁷⁴ Particular spots had *genii loci*, sometimes known generically by the epithet al-‘Azīz, a word that betokened dominion, who needed to be warded off by an incantatory formula of *ta’awwudh*,²⁷⁵ and, seemingly, by talismanic means as well.²⁷⁶ The *jinn* animated space: the timbre of their voices, a somewhat indescribable sound but often similar to the whirring of wind, is called ‘*azīf*’, and ancient Arabic poetry describes this, as well as conveying the sense of apprehension it elicits;²⁷⁷ wind, especially whirlwind, was often associated with the presence of a *jinni*.²⁷⁸ They have a special affinity to snakes,²⁷⁹ fleeting creatures as well, which seems to be quite a general association between impersonal and invisible forces and this particular animal, as we can see in depictions of the serpentine *genius loci* by the Romans.²⁸⁰ It is therefore unsurprising that the treasure

²⁶⁸ Al-Jāhiz, *al-Ḥayawān*, 6.226. The lore of inspiring demons was to develop further; see the material in Goldziher, ‘Die Ginnen der Dichter’, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2.403 f., and ‘Alwān, *Mu’raqadāt*, 44 ff.

²⁶⁹ Al-Jāhiz, *al-Ḥayawān*, 6.228. ²⁷⁰ Cf. Goldziher, *Abhandlungen*, 3 n. 4.

²⁷¹ Ḥassān b. Thābit, *Diwān*, 8.21. ²⁷² TAB, 341 f.

²⁷³ Al-Jāhiz, *al-Ḥayawān*, 6.188 ff. ²⁷⁴ Al-Hamadānī, *Ṣifa*, 128.

²⁷⁵ ‘Ajina, *Asāṭir al-‘Arab*, 2.35 ff.; *SII*, § 121; *SH*, 1.295; Fahd, *Divination*, 155 and 155 n. 6.

²⁷⁶ ‘Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.746. ²⁷⁷ Al-Jāhiz, *al-Ḥayawān*, 6.172 ff.; Āghā, *Dhū’r-Rumma*, 75 f., 160.

²⁷⁸ ‘z-b-’, *LA*. ²⁷⁹ Al-Damiri, *al-Ḥayawān*, 1.33, 40; ‘Ajina, *Asāṭir*, 1.311 ff., 2.22 ff.

²⁸⁰ *Brill’s New Pauly*, 5.757.

of the pagan Ka'ba at Mecca was thought to have been guarded by a serpent – the serpent occurs as an almost universal folkloric motif in connection with the guardianship of treasures.²⁸¹ Their preferred mounts were ibises, ostriches and hedgehogs,²⁸² but these flighty beings are of course capable of locomotion under their own steam, of transmutation – a constant theme in *jahili* myth, sometimes, as *maskh*, used for euhemeristic interpretation or perceived as punishment for this or that infraction – and of incarnation, appearance and disappearance.²⁸³ Needless to say, such capabilities betoken prodigious capacity; the strophe in al-Nābigha al-Dhubānī's *mu'allaqa* ascribing the construction of Palmyra to the *jinn* cannot have been the first time they had been credited with such feats, and was not to be the last.²⁸⁴

There is extensive lore concerning activities of the *jinn*.²⁸⁵ They mingle with humans and toy with them, sometimes playfully and often maliciously.²⁸⁶ They insinuate ideas and designs into human minds by suggestion, *waswās*,²⁸⁷ a sensory word which might be regarded as a kind of low inspiration. They belong to tribes with identifiable names, forming a parallel society to that of humans, and, on occasion, do battle with each other in the sky, riding upon and merging with the wind and clouds, and leaving their casualties upon the ground in the form of snakes. They are, as suggested, capable of transmutation and of appearance in a variety of shapes, often that of a black dog, a black cat, or an eagle or hawk,²⁸⁸ the latter eliciting divine associations. In the case of a special variety called the *ghūl*, they have the capacity to appear as a comely and nubile woman beguiling and waylaid lone travellers at night – always, however, appearing with donkey's hooves.²⁸⁹ The outcast poet Ta'abbata Sharran, some three generations before Muḥammad, is famously reported to have battled with a *ghūl*, and to have got the better of it.²⁹⁰ In Paleo-Muslim times the poet 'Ubayd b. Ayyūb (of uncertain dates) reported a *ghūl*'s siren-song, and the fire she lit around him. The *jinn* entered into oracular poetical repartee, and desolate spaces were filled with their declamatory calls, *hawātif*

²⁸¹ Al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 386; Canova, 'Serpente', 422 ff.; 'Ajīna, *Asāṭīr*, 1.320 ff. For the profuse later lore in this connection, see *SH*, 1.205 ff.

²⁸² Al-Jāhiz, *al-Hayawān*, 1.309; 6.46, 237, 257 ff.; 'Ajīna, *Asāṭīr*, 2.30 ff., 41 ff.; 'Alwān, *Mu'taqadāt*, 37 ff.

²⁸³ See 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.42 ff.; 'm-s-kh', *LA*. ²⁸⁴ Text in al-Tabrīzī, *Sharḥ*, 1.23.

²⁸⁵ 'Ajīna, *Asāṭīr*, 2, ch. 5, *passim*. ²⁸⁶ 'Ajīna, *Asāṭīr*, 2.38 ff.

²⁸⁷ The word itself suggests the timbre of clinking jewellery: al-Tabrīzī, *Sharḥ*, 306 n. 4.

²⁸⁸ Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Hawātif*, nos. 110 ff., 113 ff., 158, 174 f.; 'Ajīna, *Asāṭīr*, 2.25 ff.

²⁸⁹ The fullest single account seems to be that of al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, §§ 1196-1203. See also al-Jāhiz, *Hayawān*, 6.158 ff., 214.

²⁹⁰ Al-Jāhiz, *Hayawān*, 6.233 f. The poem is in Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shi'r*, 1.313 f.

(sg. *hātaf*).²⁹¹ They were jealous beings of brittle temper and took offence easily, hence the inadvisability of urinating in spots where they might abide unseen.²⁹²

We have evidence of the personal name Shaytān, but also of the arguably theophoric or perhaps apotropaic ‘Abd al-Jinn.²⁹³ The *jinn* have preternatural powers associated with divinity, particularly with lesser divinities who act as messengers: properties of transfiguration and rapid locomotion, the capacity for inspiration and prophecy. They were thought by Arabs to be the cause of the plague, which was called *rimāḥ al-jinn*, spears of the *jinn*.²⁹⁴ They were, in later Muslim traditions, graded according to the degree of power they held and the degree of harm they could cause, rising from *shaytān*, on to *mārid*, and finally to the *‘ifrit*, although this systematic classification is unlikely to correspond to conceptions of the pagan Arabs.²⁹⁵

It is also a telling indicator of their status in religious belief and practice that the *jinn* entered into relations with humans that required propitiation and supplication. So also is the belief that, as a collectivity, they form part of the world of the divine – earlier, in the Syrian steppe, they seem to have moved as a group from being designated by a collective noun to having proper names, and had iconographic representation analogous to that of rider-deities like ‘Azīzu and Mun‘imu.²⁹⁶

There are indications that some Arabs (B. Mulayḥ of Khuzā’a) offered sacrifices to the *jinn*,²⁹⁷ probably apotropaically. The *jinn* were at once natural and preternatural. They were natural in that they were immediately tangible, not absent beings, who lived in collectivities which, albeit invisible, mirrored human society.²⁹⁸ Being so familiar and anthropopathic, and so constantly present, the *jinn* were nevertheless brought not so much into the ambit of humanity as into a position of liminality, as an instance of the immanently and animistically sacred, at the interface between the holy, which, like kingship, requires propitiation and supplication, and the profane. This immanence is, in monotheistic religions, an essential *differentia* delimiting the profane from the transcendence of the sacred, irrespective

²⁹¹ Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shi’r*, no. 82 and *passim*.

²⁹² Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shi’r*, no. 134. This belief persists still in Syria.

²⁹³ For instance, al-Hilli, *Manāqib*, 286; Goldziher, *Abhandlungen*, 106 f. For a tally of this and other pre-Islamic theophoric compounds with ‘Abd: Caetani and Gabrieli, *Onomasticon*, I. § 45.

²⁹⁴ Al-Jāhiz, *al-Hayawān*, 6.218; Tha’alibī, *Thimār*, no. 89.

²⁹⁵ Al-Jāhiz, *al-Hayawān*, 6.190. ²⁹⁶ LIMC, 4.1.179 f., 4.2.100.

²⁹⁷ Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣnām*, 34; al-Ḥut, *al-Mithūlujiyā*, 226. Henninger (‘Geistesglaube’, 304) restricts these to apotropaic functions.

²⁹⁸ It might be remembered that Athena acted like a familiar *ra’iy* when she appeared to Achilles, unseen to others present around him, to warn him against smiting Agamemnon (*Iliad*, 1.198).

of the degree to which this transcendence may take on anthromorphic and anthropopathic characters in myth.²⁹⁹ That with propitiation and supplication the *jinn* entered into a relationship of reciprocal exchange with humans is unexceptional, as this relationship is standard in religions and crucial to cult overall.³⁰⁰ Their preternatural character arises more from their uncanny status than from their chthonian associations, which indicate a dwelling-place no less marvellous than the celestial, to which they also had access.

One should be consequentially aware of the fact that demons might be considered as deities that did not attain a status beyond the determinedly local or the tutelary, *Augenblicksgötter*, with the consequence that gods and demons were not differentiated according to a hierarchical taxonomy in functional terms. The ambiguous position of demons in itself arises not from religious practice at their concrete points of application, but from their relegation to ambiguity by a priestly or a scriptural agency which assures the formal integrity and continuity of cult.³⁰¹

What did differentiate these forbidding but, to some, companionable deities was regular and durable cult. Where relationships with the *jinn*, of reciprocity, inspiration or indeed command, was personal or episodic, humans entered into relationships with deities through the collective phenomenon of cult, which implies specific places and times, and specific rites, no matter how vernacular and locally restricted. One inscription from an unspecified date at Bi'r 'Urwa outside Medina has one *Slm* offer, in his individual capacity, a sacrificial lamb to an unspecified and unnamed force, clearly dwelling there but bereft of a formal cult, sacrifice having been offered ad hoc.³⁰² Whether this force was called a *jinni* or a god we shall never know, and does not really matter.

While relations to the *jinn* were managed ad hoc, and are unlikely to have required more than minimal formality, relations to deities required more permanent forms of separation and demarcation.³⁰³ Safaitic altars give only infrequent indication of the deity to whom they were erected, and do not suggest that the locations were themselves cultic.³⁰⁴ We have here a picture of gods of the moment; but it is not the only one. For in addition to these floating energies, we also have a very broad scatter of divine names throughout Arabia, located in time and place, specified by

²⁹⁹ Cf. the discussion of Caillois, *Homme*, 45 ff., and cf. Chelhod, 'Notion ambigu', 71, 75.

³⁰⁰ Burkert, *Creation*, 129 ff.

³⁰¹ See Gauchet, *Désenchantement*, 22; Weber, *Economy and Society*, I.424 ff.

³⁰² Rostem, *Rock Inscriptions*, 13 and fig. 2.

³⁰³ Cf. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 22 and 9 ff. ³⁰⁴ Ryckmans, 'Sacrifice *dbb*', 431, 435.

ritual times, places and rites – in short, what we have seen to be *Sondergötter* with varying degrees of durability.

The *jinn* dwelt in shrubs,³⁰⁵ and some deities – Dhū'l-Khalāṣa, Dhū Sharā – have names deriving from trees and bushes.³⁰⁶ Dhāt Anwāt was a large tree of indefinite description venerated by Quraysh, and in Najrān people worshipped a tall palm tree. Both were the sites of sacrifice, and were, like idols, decorated with precious cloth and jewellery. The oath of allegiance to Muḥammad at al-Ḥudaybiyya was a *bay'a* received as he sat under a *samura* tree, a location containing a tree sacred to the pagan Arabs.³⁰⁷

Idolatry

A sacred location would generally be centred around an unworked stone or a stele, of various degrees of shaping and artfulness, sometimes in terms of a particular spatial arrangement, and often with a flat stone as an offering shelf, a *nuṣṣub* (pl. *anṣāb*). It sometimes housed an idol. The betyl was often dressed or covered with precious materials³⁰⁸ – the Ka'ba at Mecca still acquires its 'clothing' (*kiswa*) annually. This recalls similar arrangements by ancient Hebrews, Greeks and others.³⁰⁹ The three acacia trees sacred to al-'Uzzā of Quraysh in a ravine at Nakhla, and the *ḥaram* locations dedicated to her by the Quraysh in ravines outside Mecca, most likely prior to their settlement in Mecca, are well known. So is a sacred stone, reportedly carved as an idol, and a grotto at Ghabghab, where sacrifices were offered.³¹⁰ Another, minor deity, Dhāt Nuwāt or Dhāt Anwāt already

³⁰⁵ Henninger, 'Geistesglaube', 301.

³⁰⁶ Thus, *sharā* is a bitter *ḥanzal* bush, *Citrullus colocynthis*, and Khalāṣa is an odiferous tree bearing red berries: Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishtiqāq*, 503.

³⁰⁷ TAB, 259; WAQ, 890 f., towards which Muḥammad seems to have had an ambivalent attitude. This location became (or, more likely, had been previously) an object of veneration: Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2.95 f. A mosque was later erected there. See also Busse, 'Islam', 115, and Robertson Smith, *Religion*, 184.

³⁰⁸ 'Baetylia', *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, 1.644.

³⁰⁹ Nevo, *Pagans and Herders*, 126; 2 Kings 17.10 and *passim*; van den Toorn, 'Worshipping stones', 7, 11; Wellhausen, *Reste*, 141 ff.; 'Baetylia', *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*. Definite traces of animism unadorned by the mythological and philosophical elaborations of religion are retained in Greek myth and cult at the point of concrete application: the stone that Rhea gave Chronos to swallow in lieu of his son was qualified as *baitilos*, thus accounting implicitly for the elder deity's acceptance of Rhea's metec offering. At Delphi, a stone representing the stone of Chronos was anointed with oil and dressed up (*Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, 1.645).

³¹⁰ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 315; Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣnām*, 18 f., 20 f., 25, 27; 'Nakhla' and 'al-'Uzzā', *EI*; Robertson Smith, *Religion*, 184 ff.

mentioned, was also located at a tree, and visited by worshippers on set days.³¹¹

The Qur'ān is well aware that God addressed Moses from a bush (Q, 28.29), and one presumes that no knowledge of Moses would have been necessary for its audience to connect deities and their voices with bushes. References to heights abound,³¹² and the word *tāghūt*, used in the Qur'ān with reference to pagan deities (Q, 2.256f.), is semantically associated with heights, and not only with possible Aramaean or Ethiopian etymologies and uses.³¹³ The Prophet is reported to have mentioned this, along with reference to individual camels that may have been venerated.³¹⁴ Polytheistic Arabs are reported to have invoked their sacred heights, along with the sun, as they concluded alliances,³¹⁵ possibly with reference to territorial markers. Deities in certain cases, particularly in Yemen, looked after the receipt and redistribution of taxes, and guaranteed property boundaries.³¹⁶ Heights were very extensively and elaborately recalled in legendary form in Paleo-Islamic times,³¹⁷ and we have already considered a number of heights surrounding Mecca.

Sacred spaces not infrequently contained votive treasures placed in a hollow near the idol, generally called a *ghabghab*,³¹⁸ temples at Qaryat al-Fāw illustrate this well.³¹⁹ The one at the Meccan Ka'ba has already been mentioned, but there were others as well.³²⁰ Among votive offerings were swords, such as those reportedly given to Manāt by the Jafnid king al-Hārith b. Abī Shammar, later given by Muḥammad to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, becoming the famous Dhū'l Fiqr – although other reports have it that these were found at the shrine of al-Falas (or al-Fuls), a deity of Ṭay'³²¹ who dwelt towards the north and north-east of Medina in areas previously under Nabataean and, later, Jafnid control. The pit of Allāt at al-Ṭā'if contained gold, silver and perfume, and the idol itself was lavishly dressed and

³¹¹ Al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 82 f.

³¹² Robin, 'Montagnes'; al-Nu'aymī, *al-Uṣṭūra*, 166 ff., who also brings out mythologemes concerning heights involving eagles and loving couples.

³¹³ Fahd, *Panthéon*, 240, 240 n. 2. Nabī occurs in Arabic toponyms: Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 36.

³¹⁴ Bin Ṣarāy, *al-Ibīl*, 97, 97 n. 2, who also brings evidence of oaths by camels and other associated practices (100 f., 104).

³¹⁵ Al-Jāhīz, *al-Ḥayawān*, 4.275. ³¹⁶ CIS, 4/11, no. 555; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 141.

³¹⁷ Akhbār 'Ubayd b. Shīrya, 370, 374 ff. ³¹⁸ WAQ, 972, with reference to Allāt at al-Ṭā'if.

³¹⁹ Al-Anṣārī, *Qaryat al-Fāw*, 20.

³²⁰ See, on the whole, Rubin, 'Ḥanīfiyya', 116 f.; Lecker, 'Idol worship', 12; Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 24 ff. It is reported that a ram's horns were found in the treasure of the Ka'ba, later interpreted as the remains of Abraham's ram: WAQ, 114, 155 f.

³²¹ Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣnām*, 15; WAQ, 984 f., 988, which speaks of the treasure as containing swords and armour, and the idol as having been draped.

draped.³²² But the cornerstone of these spaces, when properly elaborated, seems to have been the dwelling of the deity and the altar, however shaped. In forms of ANA, such as Safaitic, and in Nabataean, this was normally called *msǧd* or some variation on this word³²³ – the mosque was and is still known by Muslims as a *maṣjid*, of which there is a Syriac cognate,³²⁴ and South Arabian and Ge'ez as well. They were houses of gods.³²⁵ The cult-stone or its altar (*nuṣub*) was highly sacralised, in a manner that would bear comparison with those other cultic auxiliaries, the heavenly bodies. It has even been suggested that these cultic accessories were divinised.³²⁶ In all cases, we have the representation of a deity or an invisible kratophany enshrined in an object, stable or portable.

It seems that stones, stelae and altars, worked or unworked, carved or uncarved, were animate objects. They were not unlike archaic and classical Greek unworked stones, which continued to be in cultic use well into the period that saw the full efflorescence of Greek sculpture, and throughout Hellenistic and late antique times. In the case of anthropomorphic cult objects, divine power residing within belies their human appearance, and their animate quality belies their anthropomorphic or zoomorphic materiality.³²⁷ Like all manifestations and habitations of divinity, they could be sworn by, as did an ancient Arab poet when he swore by an unspecified Ka'ba and its Lord, by the clapper of the Christians, by the Lord of those prostrate at sunset, by the stars, by a certain monk.³²⁸ The alliance reported to have been concluded between 'Abd Manāf (with Khuṣā'a) and B. al-Ḥārith b. 'Abd Manāt, the so-called Ḥilf al-Aḥābīsh – and indeed the words for 'alliance' and oath are morphologically related, for what this is worth – was sealed with an oath by 'the murderous god' (the term Allāh appears in Muslim sources – Allāh *al-qātil*), by the inviolability of the Meccan House (the Ka'ba) and some of its adjacent structures, and by the sacred months.³²⁹ Similarly, the Israelites addressed their deity through

³²² WAQ, 972. Dressing idols with textiles is in evidence in Yemen as well, in the second and third centuries BC: Robin, 'Matériaux', 41.

³²³ Littmann, *Nabataean Inscriptions*, nos. 24, 38, 96; Sourdell, *Cultes*, 105.

³²⁴ Baršūm, 'al-Alfāz' (1949), 10.

³²⁵ As early as Liḥyān, temples were considered to have been houses of deities: Abu al-Hasan, 'Roy-aume', 272.

³²⁶ Healey, *Religion*, 159; Healey, *Tomb Inscriptions*, H16.3–5 and 156 f.; cf. the discussion of Robertson Smith, *Religion*, 203 ff. Not surprisingly, a more elaborate vocabulary existed in Yemen for altars and sacrificial stones, reflecting different types of sacrifices performed: Maraqtan, 'Typen'.

³²⁷ Freedberg, *Power*, 19 ff., 66 ff., 69 ff., 74.

³²⁸ Al-A'shā, *Dīwān*, 6.62; 15.30 ff. 44; 23.26; 27.18; 44.28 – elsewhere, al-A'shā (*Dīwān*, 22.26) mentions specifically the Ka'ba of Najrān.

³²⁹ al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 1.241.

the Ark,³³⁰ His cultic accessory, and Jews, Christians and Muslims still swear on the Bible and the Qur'an.

Pagan Arabs directed worship to their *anṣāb*, of which there were various kinds, some with images, others draped, and yet others of unworked stone.³³¹ In all cases, these objects were animated, localising and concretising the energy that lay within. The 'sideral paganism' of the Arabs, whose indestructible symbol remains the Black Stone of the Meccan Ka'ba,³³² was perhaps primarily but not entirely centred around cults of betyls, although it must be said that named deities worshipped in betylic form also appeared in other forms in other places or other media, including the numismatic medium, such as Dhū Sharā and Allāt.³³³ Arab literary traditions indicate the presence of idols (*aṣnām*, *awthān*) alongside betyls (*anṣāb*, *nuṣub*), in frequent but not always very specific detail.³³⁴

Whatever the terminology, we do have indications in the literary sources that certain objects of worship were anthropomorphic or zoomorphic.³³⁵ There are reports of stones removed from the Meccan *ḥaram* and shaped into the idols/betyls that surrounded the Ka'ba.³³⁶ As indicated above, the ruins of Qaryat al-Fāw contained many statues, often imported from abroad, one at least of which was made to stand for a local deity, or incorporated as a novel deity. We also have, famously, the Meccan Hubal,³³⁷ reportedly imported by 'Amr b. Luḥayy, possibly but by no means certainly a legendary figure.³³⁸

Not very much is known about this deity apart from his cleromantic capacities. The name *Hbl* is attested in a Safaitic inscription, possibly but not necessarily as the name of a divinity.³³⁹ A deity named *Hblw* is attested

³³⁰ Judges 20.27 ff. ³³¹ Martin, 'Discours', 134 n. 3; Healey, *Religion*, 156 f.

³³² Sayous, *Jésus-Christ*, 21. On black stones in a comparative context, Lenormant, 'Culte payen', 118 f., 122 f., and see Fahd, *Panthéon*, 169.

³³³ Among others: Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, 20 n. 13; Krone, *al-Lāt*, §§ 5.2.2 f.

³³⁴ Ibn al-Kalbi, *al-Aṣnām*, *passim*. The terminology is uncertain: see Klinker-Rosenberger, *Götzenbuch*, 25 f., and 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.71 ff., who alerts us to the use of *wathan* for the cross by al-A'shā and Muḥammad. See also 'w-th-n', *LA*. In the nineteenth century, the traveller Charles Doughty (*Travels*, 2.515 f.) describes in detail, and provides drawings of, large granite boulders at al-Ṭā'if which were reputedly the betyls of Allāt, al-'Uzzā and Hubal, noted by Klinker-Rosenberger, *Götzenbuch*, 94 n. 114.

³³⁵ Macdonald ('Goddesses, dancing girls', 27 f.) doubts that there is any securely attested archaeological example of anthropomorphic representation outside Nabataean territories.

³³⁶ Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 4.622. ³³⁷ Al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 58, 72 ff.

³³⁸ A full account based on a variety of earlier sources is given in *SH*, 1.17 ff. Another account (Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1.51) has Hubal being set up by a certain Khuzayma b. Mudrika, the first Muḍarite to dwell in Mecca until Fihir b. Mālik settled there and displaced his descendants.

³³⁹ Al-Aḥmad, *Mujtama'*, 262, which M. Macdonald (personal communication) says is uncertain as to vocalisation. It occurs nine times in Safaitic and once in Thamūdīc B, without clear indications that it had a connection with the divine name. There is mention of one Zuhayr b. Janāb b. Hubal of Quḍā'a (*AGH*, 19.15). See also Hawting, *Idolatry*, 112 f., 113 n. 5.

in a Nabataean inscriptions at Madā'in Šālih, not surprisingly in some association with Manāt who may, as suggested, have been linked with the apportioning of lot. In South Arabia *Hbl* was used as a divine epithet. In a remoter past, the name was in evidence among the Canaanites and is mentioned disparagingly in the Old Testament.³⁴⁰

For his part, the Meccan Hubal was an anthropomorphic idol, made of red agate, brought to Mecca with its right hand missing, subsequently to be replaced in gold.³⁴¹ Cleromantic deities were not foreign to Arabia, but this particular one was clearly not home-grown, although it was reputedly made to occupy the position of the titular deity of the Meccan Ka'ba.³⁴² His cleromantic capacities rendered him into a major adjudicator who received sacrifices (including sacrifices of hair).³⁴³ He also appears to have overseen certain rites of passage, such as marriage and circumcision,³⁴⁴ and it may be supposed that he would have been involved in other rites of passage, such as those involving menstruation. There are reports that he was also thought to bring victory and rain,³⁴⁵ suggesting that he had, like others, become an all-purpose deity, quite apart from his cleromantic distinction. The black stones may or may not have been related to him.

Tradition places Hubal's position inside or just outside the door to the Ka'ba, which led some scholars to identify him with Allāh.³⁴⁶ This identification is unlikely in the extreme, as the name Allāh, although it occurs in oaths,³⁴⁷ was an indefinite presence without a specific personality, with neither a cultic nor a theological description, an *Augenblicksgott* evoked in certain moments of need. It will be interesting to note that Hubal seems to have been worshipped by B. Bakr, B. Mālik and other sections of the Kināna, who worshipped also gods of Quraysh who, in their turn, worshipped theirs; there was a pit for votive gifts near the idol, in the usual way.³⁴⁸

B. Sulaf, B. 'Akk and the Ash'arītes are said to have worshipped a deity shaped from copper.³⁴⁹ Whatever the case, some deities in central Arabia

³⁴⁰ Healey, *Tomb Inscriptions*, H16.8; *Religion*, 10; 'Hubal', *DDD*. The argument (Noja, 'Hubal', 291 ff.) that his name is a local dialectal form of a generic Ba'l – il Signore – and that it is cognate with 'Ilāh (see also Pavlovich, 'Qad kunnā', 70) seems superfluous and does not carry conviction. Ha-Ba'l in Mecca makes little socio-linguistic or historical-linguistic sense. A South Arabian inscription renders *Hbl* in the sense of an old man (Moubarac, 'Noms', 355).

³⁴¹ Al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 31, 58, 73 f.; Ibn al-Kalbī, *Aṣnām*, 27 f.

³⁴² Pavlovich, 'Qad kunnā', 70. ³⁴³ WAQ, 299 and 296 f.

³⁴⁴ These points are well brought out by Pavlovich, 'Qad kunnā', 70. ³⁴⁵ Al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 73.

³⁴⁶ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 75; Pavlovich, 'Qad kunnā', 70; and see Rodinson, 'Lune', 164. For the location of Hubal, WAQ, 832, using the unclear expression *wujāh al-Ka'ba*, on which 'w-j-h', *LA*.

³⁴⁷ For a useful account, see 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.105 ff. ³⁴⁸ Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamhara*, 492.

³⁴⁹ Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamhara*, 494.

seem to have acquired, with time and no matter how patchily, a plastic representation, a fact ascribed by some to Nabataean and south Syrian influences in the fourth century.³⁵⁰ Ibn al-Kalbī's description of the idol Wadd at Dūmat al-Jandal has been considered to be reminiscent of sculptures at Palmyra and of the iconography of Dagon at Dura Europos, represented with sword, bow, quiver and spear.³⁵¹ Clearly, even if aniconism was prevalent, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representation of deities, local as well as imported, was not unknown, and the cases of Wadd and Hubal are not unique.³⁵² Wadd's cult was controlled by B. al-Farāfiṣa of Kalb³⁵³ who were later to be close allies of the Umayyads. It also seems that idols became domestic items in Mecca and elsewhere, with local professional carvers, using a variety of marketing techniques, doing brisk business with visiting Bedouins;³⁵⁴ earlier, moulds for mass-producing statues existed at Qaryat al-Fāw.³⁵⁵

Thus, iconic images mingled with the aniconic representations, anthropomorphic ones with draperies and jewellery, those carved or otherwise fashioned of stone with those made of wood – a scarce commodity, it must be remembered.³⁵⁶ Deities were also represented by empty thrones, evidence for which comes from the Yemenite Jawf and Najrān.³⁵⁷ What is important in this regard is the representation of the deity, and the correlation between cult object and its divine inhabitant. The mode of representation itself was not part of some inherent scheme of movement or development as much as a matter of 'habīṭ',³⁵⁸ related to available media of cultural representation, and of course to the centrifugal tendencies discussed at many points above, when available. 'Aniconism' in this context is less a state of mind than a

³⁵⁰ Fahd, *Panthéon*, 29 ff. On the import of idols into central Arabia over the centuries, see King, 'Sculptures', 147 f.

³⁵¹ Stummer, 'Bemerkungen', 382. See Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣnām*, pp. 10, 56; Lecker, 'Wadd', 134 f. On confusion and uncertainty surrounding this particular idol and the report concerning it, see 'Wadd', *EL*.

³⁵² See, for instance, the tables of forms of divine representation, autochthonous and otherwise, at Taymā' during an earlier epoch by Hausleiter, 'Divine representations', 317 ff.

³⁵³ Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamhara*, 492.

³⁵⁴ Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣnām*, 32; WAQ, 870 f.; Fahd, *Panthéon*, 29 ff.; Lecker, *People*, ch. III, p. 37.

³⁵⁵ Sinān, *al-Funūn*, 66 f., 281 ff. (a winged human figure, a camel, the head of a bull, human parts), who reconstructs (at 74 ff., 353 ff.) possible techniques of manufacture. It is also reported that the idols of some poorer groups may have been made of comestibles, consumed in situations of scarcity, and that one such idol was consumed during famine by the B. Ḥanifa in Najd (al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 106 ff.; Ibn Sa'īd, *Nashwa*, 1.75 f.; and see Robertson Smith, *Religion*, 184 ff. Cf. Martin, 'Discours', 130 f., 134), but this is likely to have been a satirical skit by Muslim authors. On the consistent use of classical visual motifs in Arabia, see Dodd, 'Image', 39 and n. 11.

³⁵⁶ Fahd, *Panthéon*, 24 ff. ³⁵⁷ Robin, 'Matériaux', 61 ff.; Arbach *et al.*, 'Sanctuaire'.

³⁵⁸ Goodman, *Languages*, 38.

presumption, a teleological motif fired by monotheistic polemic;³⁵⁹ certain betylic deities, such as the Palmyrene Yarḥibōl, did under certain conditions take on representational form, some very impressive.³⁶⁰ Thus for instance, late antique Ḥawrān registers an important incidence of betyls in the south, but not in the north.³⁶¹ Allāt, as we have seen, could be a granite slab as well as Athena Parthenos. But these were, as suggested, different deities, in a highly fragmented universe of divinity, open to novelty. In Nabataean terrains, one scholar spoke appropriately of a 'serene cohabitation' between folk aniconism and the anthropomorphism and zoomorphism of an elite acculturated into Roman norms.³⁶²

Still, aniconic betyls and stelae predominated, as well as cairns before which rites and sacrifices were performed.³⁶³ One such small sanctuary, at 'Ān Halkān some 140 km north-east of Najrān on the way to Qaryat al-Fāw, was recently studied, with locals affirming the existence of many others in the vicinity.³⁶⁴ Any representations of deities have left only very scarce archaeological traces across Arabia.³⁶⁵ One of the best known was described by al-Fākihī, an eyewitness in the middle of the ninth century. This was the betyl at the Maqām in Mecca on which was an inscription in an indeterminate script, along with representations of circles, triangles, squares and oblongs.³⁶⁶ For his part, the cleromantic deity at Dhū'l-Khalaṣa was nameless, referred to by the toponym he bore in a mountainous location some seven nights' journey (about 200 km) from Mecca on the road to Yemen. He may have been a local *jinni* and lord of the territory. Worshipped by Daws, Khath'am, Bajīla and Azd of Jabal al-Sarāt, he was represented by a quartziferous white rock, dressed by worshippers in necklaces, on which was carved the shape of a crown.³⁶⁷

Allāt, venerated seemingly by all, was represented by a square rock at al-Ṭā'if, the cult being superintended by B. Abū'l-Āṣ of the B. Mālik.³⁶⁸ Al-'Uzzā of Quraysh was an idol placed below a palm tree at Nakhla,

³⁵⁹ Freedberg, *Power*, 54 ff. Robin ('Matériaux', 10) speaks of 'reticence' towards the representation of deities, when one would rather consider iconism as habitual and other forms of representation as non-habitual.

³⁶⁰ Kaizer, *Religious Life*, 155; Seyrig, 'Antiquités syriennes', 93, 91 f. ³⁶¹ Sourdel, *Cultes*, 112.

³⁶² Sachet, 'Dieux et hommes', 252 f. ³⁶³ These were called *rijām*: al-Tabrīzī, *Sharḥ*, 153 n. 1.

³⁶⁴ Arbach *et al.*, 'Sanctuaire'. ³⁶⁵ See Robin, 'Matériaux', 68 ff., for south Arabia.

³⁶⁶ Kister, 'Maqām Ibrāhīm', Arabic text at 487 ff. Al-Fākihī took the script for Hebrew (486); Kister conjectures it was *musnad* (487). It has already been suggested that there is not as yet a study of these figures that are altogether common in Arabian petroglyphs, which include diamonds and strokes, in sets of 7 or multiples of 7 (M. Macdonald, private communication, holds that the normal interpretation of these as apotropaic figures is a 'default' interpretation).

³⁶⁷ Ibn al-Kalbī, *Aṣnām*, 34, 36; al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 78; Wellhausen, *Reste*, 45 ff.

³⁶⁸ Ibn al-Kalbī, *Aṣnām*, 16, 27; Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamhara*, 491; Wellhausen, *Reste*, 29 ff.

worshipped also by Ghatafān and Bāhila, its cult superintended by B. Ṣirma b. Murra. The erstwhile Nabataean Dhū Sharā seems to have persisted in reduced condition, with an idol of unknown description.³⁶⁹ Whether the idol of Wadd was manufactured locally or, as is more likely, imported from the north will never be established. In none of the cases mentioned do we find any traces of a uniform representational programme for cult objects, but we do have a certain uniformity of cultic practice. The most durable of older betylic representations of noumena was the Black Stone of the Meccan Ka'ba. To this betyl was ascribed, apart from its natural unsculpted shape, the traces of an engraving, which St John of Damascus said still survived during his own time,³⁷⁰ reminiscent of and possibly conflated with the betyl at the Maqām described above.

Black stones that descended from heaven were not restricted to Mecca. The Greeks, classical and late antique, knew and venerated these celestial aerolites, as did the Phrygians, the Phoenicians and the Emessans.³⁷¹ It may be remembered that when the cult of Cybele (Magna Mater) was introduced to Rome in 205 BC, her black stone was brought over from Pergamum.³⁷² The Meccan Black Stone was clearly inhabited by a preternatural power, and still is. Muslim traditions have it that, had it not been for its having been soiled by pagans and their rites, it would have had the capacity to heal every infirmity.³⁷³ Similarly to the way in which Yahweh rested the soles of his feet in His Temple,³⁷⁴ Muḥammad is reported to have stated that the Black Stone was the hand of al-Raḥmān, and a tradition going back to Ibn 'Abbās has it that whoever had not acknowledged the prophecy of Muḥammad before him in person could do so by touching the Black Stone.³⁷⁵

Several betyls of this kind may have existed in the Arabian Peninsula, each enclosed in a *ḥaram*.³⁷⁶ In its classical form, the Meccan *ḥaram* comprised, most centrally it seems, the Black Stone,³⁷⁷ set into the south-western corner of the Ka'ba (*al-rukn*). The Ḥujr nearby, it will be remembered, seems to have been a pen for sacrificial animals consecrated to the deity and

³⁶⁹ Ibn al-Kalbī, *Aṣnām*, 37. Some Nabataeans may still have existed and been called such; after the fall of their kingdom, the name of the Nabataeans, and of the Nabataean language, came to have a variety of meanings: Moritz, *Sinaitikult*, 45; Retsö, *Arabs in Antiquity*, 378 ff.

³⁷⁰ Sahas, *John of Damascus*, p. 137.

³⁷¹ 'Baetylia', *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, 1.643; Freedberg, *Power*, 66 ff.; Cumont, *Oriental Religions*, 46 f.; Fahd, *Panthéon*, 169; Millar, *Roman Near East*, 301.

³⁷² Beard *et al.*, *Religions*, 96. ³⁷³ Al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 32; *SII*, § 81.

³⁷⁴ Ezekiel 53.6–7. ³⁷⁵ Al-Fākihī, *Makka*, 1.no. 27.

³⁷⁶ See also Ibn al-Kalbī, *Aṣnām*, 44 f. and Kister, 'Mecca and the tribes', 43, 52.

³⁷⁷ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 74; Grimme, *Muhammad*, 1.45 f.

marked as His with special marks of scarification,³⁷⁸ and one would expect that livestock would generally have borne marks of property (*wasm*).³⁷⁹ There was also a votive treasury within the Ka‘ba, and there are indications that treaties and other important documents were deposited within, in line with a very general phenomenon.³⁸⁰ This invites comparison with the sanctum of the temple at Qaryat al-Fāw, with its shelves where offerings and other materials might be deposited.³⁸¹

A large number of idols were located near the Ka‘ba and on surrounding heights, and the structure itself may have contained murals depicting both ancestors and deities, and aspects of the pilgrimage. Isāf and Nā‘ila in the Ka‘ba’s immediate surroundings have already been mentioned. But despite the profusion of detail, according to an extended tradition transmitted by Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna,³⁸² the picture remains unclear.

Overall, Meccan devotions are uncertain as to detail, and it is extremely difficult to disengage the relations between their component parts. The uncertainty extends to al-‘Uzzā, who is thought to have been the most revered deity of Quraysh, but whose representation in the Meccan *ḥaram* is nowhere mentioned. We have already seen that Quraysh worshipped a variety of deities in a variety of settings, to which we might add an idol at Buwāna, between Syria and Diyār Banī ‘Āmir, worshipped annually with sacrifices of animals and hair.³⁸³ We have no idea which sections of Quraysh adopted which deity as titular, who it was that favoured al-‘Uzzā and who favoured Isāf and Nā‘ila or indeed others, whether any representations of these were also kept at home like the Roman Lares, and whether the latter pair were regarded as federal Qurayshi deities. Like the Hebrews before them, the Arabs occasionally transported deities, in a leather canopy

³⁷⁸ Once the sacrificial animal is scarified it becomes a *hadī*. Sheep had one of their ears slit, and were then designated *baḥīra*, camels being called *budn*, but bovines were also admissible for sacrifice, and horses as well (*al-ḥāmī*). Such animals were also made to wear chaplets (*qalā‘id*) of wool (*‘ihm*), like those reportedly woven by ‘Ā’isha for Muḥammad’s sacrificial animals. On occasion they were made to wear a blade around the neck. See Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishtiqāq*, 191; Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2.91, 98; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 2.206 f., 208; Q, 5.2, 96; Chelhod, *Sacrifice*, 61 ff.; Qaṭāt, *al-‘Arab*, 330 ff.; al-Sa‘fī, *al-Qurbān*, 191 ff., 205 ff., 224 ff. See also Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 589 n. 480; Rubin, ‘Ḥanīfiyya’, 323.

³⁷⁹ Van Gennep, “Wasm”, 93; ‘w-s-m’, *LA*; ‘Wasm’, *EL*. The *wasm* figures in Safaitic inscriptions reproduced in al-Aḥmad, *Muḥammad*, 229.

³⁸⁰ Schoeler, ‘Writing’, 242 ff. See also, with regard to ancient Rome, Sawyer, *Sacred Languages*, 45.

³⁸¹ Al-Anṣārī, *Qaryat al-Fāw*, 20.

³⁸² Al-Fakihi, *Makka*, no. 1181. That al-Marwa was a sacrificial site (indicated by its designation *muṭ‘im al-tayr*) was already signalled by Wellhausen, *Reste*, 77. Muḥammad had performed pagan sacrifice of camels there: see Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣnām*, 19; Wellhausen, *Reste*, 30, 34; Birkeland, *Lord*, 28 ff.; Kister, ‘Bag of meat’, *passim*; Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 594 n. 515, 595 n. 522, and 473–4 n. 45.

³⁸³ Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1.132.

(*qubba*) mounted on a camel as they moved, most particularly to help in battle, and this practice continued into Paleo-Islamic times. Spatial sanctity and inviolability could be translated, along with the movements of votaries. At the Battle of Uḥud, the Meccans and their allies from al-Ṭāʾif are said to have deployed against Muḥammad's forces both al-ʿUzzā and Allāt, accompanied by Abū Sufyān, presumably placed in a *qubba*.³⁸⁴

In their profusion of detail, Meccan devotions convey a sense of rapid flux, which probably gives a much broader picture, and seem to carry within them the original deities of tribal sections that ultimately came together to found Quraysh. What is clear is that there was a rapid transformation in the social geography of worship there, and that this saw the association in one sacred area of a variety of disparate and competing rites, finally ending with the amalgamation and ranking – social as well as cultic – of the two pilgrimage itineraries of the *ḥajj* and the *ʿumra* under Muḥammad.³⁸⁵ This amalgamation was clearly not received without discomfort, as would be evident from a saying attributed to ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd, speaking in favour of the *ʿumra* that had earlier been the more important rite for the Meccans, but which with Muḥammad became the 'lesser pilgrimage'.³⁸⁶

An impression of the mood induced by this situation in an independent spirit might be gathered from the satirical strophes of al-Aʿshā.³⁸⁷ Indeed, as a result of this situation of inter-divine competition, a segment of Ghaṭafān transferred their own ʿUzzā from the Meccan sanctuary to a position almost mid-way between Mecca and Najrān. This clearly constituted an unsuccessful attempt to set up an alternative trans-local sanctuary modelled upon the Meccan, as we saw. The new site used some Meccan spolia, and attempted to reconstruct the spatial layout of the Meccan site, including its dimensions, in a situation of difficult and changing relations with Quraysh and in tandem with a larger movement of clans.³⁸⁸

But Mecca was not the only trans-local site of pilgrimage frequented by the Arabs. At al-Uqayṣir on the borderland with Syria was another location that housed several idols by which poets such as Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā and others swore, and before which were performed sacrifices, including sacrifices of hair. It was frequented by Quḍāʾa, Lakhm, Judhām, ʿĀmila

³⁸⁴ TAB, 392 – this account does not appear in *Sīra* works. See also Krone, *al-Lāt*, 393 f. Wellhausen (*Reste*, 102) restricts the religious use of this canopy to war. Note the Old Testament parallel in 2 Samuel 7.1–13, 111 ff.

³⁸⁵ Rubin, 'Ḥanifiyya', 97 ff., 107, 118 ff., 125 ff.; Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 289 ff., 319 ff., 357 ff.; Juʿayt, *al-Sīra*, 2.102 ff.; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 6.176 f.; MbS, 1.175, 448 f. Cf. Fahd, *Panthéon*, 203 ff.

³⁸⁶ Al-Sijistānī, *al-Maṣābiḥ*, 56.

³⁸⁷ Al-Aʿshā, *Diwān*, 15.35–7.

³⁸⁸ ʿAbbās, 'Naṣṣān', 30 f., 32, and cf. Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣnām*, 18 and Wellhausen, *Reste*, 33 n. 2.

and Ghatafān.³⁸⁹ A different regime of cultic integration was devised by B. Bakr b. Wā'il in east Arabia, obscurely suggested by the story that an idol worshipped at al-Muḥarraḡ was thought to have sent his sons to be worshipped by the various sections of Rabī'a in their various domains.³⁹⁰

Supremacy in the preternatural realm, expressed in cultic control, was sensitive to changes in and transferences of chiefly prerogatives from the social realm, by analogy with the fact that 'the ancestral hierarchy is also a hierarchy of territorial spirits'.³⁹¹ In all cases, the matter devolved the establishment of a deity in a 'house', and its designation as Lord of the House (*rabb al-bayt*), the house being in some circumstances transportable. This bears comparison with Israelite usage of the Tabernacle, *mishkan*,³⁹² but is also attested widely as, for instance, in a Thamūdīc inscription at Madā'in Šālīḡ mentioning *mr' byt*,³⁹³ as well as in poetry.³⁹⁴

The Meccan Ka'ba was of course the most famous of these houses, at least to posterity. We have already discussed what the Ka'ba may originally have been, and there were a number of cultic structures known as such: at Sindād, south of what later became al-Kūfa, Iyād had set up an idol, associated with a *bayt* called 'of the Ka'bas', Dhū'l-Ka'bāt (but possibly also Dhū'l-Ka'bayn, which conveys an altogether different sense).³⁹⁵ The idol of Dhū'l-Khalaṣa of Khath'am was, as is well known, enshrined in what was called the Yemenite Ka'ba, al-Ka'ba al-Yamāniyya. Most famously, and this example may mitigate any desire to overinterpret the physical shape of these structures, was the Ka'ba of Najrān, made especially famous by a poem by al-A'shā.³⁹⁶ This was by all accounts a sumptuous structure, made of the tanned hides of 300 animals in the shape of a vast *qubba*. It was, like other deities' houses of this type, a place of refuge, asylum and help, constructed by B. 'Abd al-Maddān b. al-Dayyān al-Ḥārithī, and apparently controlled by 'Abd al-Masīḡ b. 'Adī b. Ma'qil. But it was not the house of a betyl, like the Najrānī *K'batān mentioned above, though quite probably inspired by the term. It appears rather to have been a church (*bī'a*), or at least a structure associated with an Arabised form of Christianity;³⁹⁷ we shall see that some earlier forms of Arab Christianity did not always find the worship of deities other than Christ inadmissible.

³⁸⁹ Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 1.340. ³⁹⁰ Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamhara*, 493. ³⁹¹ Friedman, 'Tribes', 178.

³⁹² See Lammens' critical comments ('Culte', 40 ff.) on Wellhausen's rejection of the notion of transportable betyls (*Reste*, 102).

³⁹³ JS, Nab. 57, 58.

³⁹⁴ For instance, in the *mu'allaqa* of Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā, text in al-Tabrīzī, *Sharḡ*, 1.17.

³⁹⁵ 'k-'b', *LA*; *AGH*, 23.12; Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamhara*, 494.

³⁹⁶ *Dīwān*, 22. ³⁹⁷ Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 4.756; *AGH*, 11.255, 12.7.

What mattered was less the shape or the terminology than the function of extending the prerogatives and privileges of protection and neutrality on sacred ground, and of cultic worship at the point of application, worship that might be exclusive, or federal, as was the case at Mecca or al-Uqayṣir. Like the nameless lord of Dhū'l-Khalāṣa, the Lord of the Meccan Ka'ba was the lord of the place, Lord of the House, the House being the sacred enclave of the Ka'ba. Muḥammad's paternal grandfather, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib b. Hāshim, credited with much activity in the religious life of Mecca in the period under scrutiny,³⁹⁸ swore by the 'Lord of the House with the sacred stones' (*Rabb al-Bayt dhī'l-Anṣāb*), though he is also credited by tradition as having sworn by Allāh 'his' god ('Allāh *rabbī*').³⁹⁹ In a moment of irenicism, 'Amr b. Luḥayy is said to have declared that this lord, *rabb*, spent his winters at the sanctuary of Allāt at al-Ṭā'if, and his summers at that of al-'Uzzā,⁴⁰⁰ probably reflecting Meccan transhumance and, more pertinently for polytheistic structures, the seasonal adoption of different tutelary deities.

Contending with the preternatural

The majority of late antique Arabs, we have seen, worshipped divinities not according to a theological or priestly programme of devotion, but in terms of social devotions rarely transcending the point of application – a worship of lords of the moment and place, at the proper place and time, with little beyond the occasion and the purpose of the occasion, be this purpose one of emblematising social integration, or the performance of an exchange of favours between devotees and divinities, and the warding off of natural (and other) calamities, praying for the maintenance of natural regularity and predictability and for the prevention of nature's excesses. This, along with appropriate times and places, is the substance of sacrifice, be it expiatory, apotropaic, votive or devotional, or indeed a combination of some or all of these.

The pagan lords of the Arabs required propitiation and supplication, and this needed to be done communally. Primitive and extremely obscure rites like '*aqd al-sila*', during which branches of the *sila*' bush would be tied to the tails of cattle⁴⁰¹ and set alight, the animals then being let loose at a height in order to cause rain to fall, were, one would presume,

³⁹⁸ For an interpretation of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib's historical role, see Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 24 ff.

³⁹⁹ *SII*, § 20. ⁴⁰⁰ *SH*, 3.275.

⁴⁰¹ This bush was obtainable from Ghadīr Khumm in Tihāma: 'Arrām, *Tihāma*, 33. Various rituals involving cattle, on Qur'ānic evidence, are described by Crone, 'Religion', 388 f.

the prerogative of a community duly led and induced to perform this rite. Later Muslim *istisqā'* (rain-making) prayers were to become the prerogative of the Caliphs.⁴⁰² Clearly, inducing the action of the sublime needed in general to be communal, as a cult was also a token of communal coherence embedded within social relations and structures of leadership, and a sacral community needed to be a sacrificial community.⁴⁰³

Sacrifice

Deities seem routinely to have received heave offerings, a certain share of individual and collective wealth. As noted with some vexation in the Qur'an (Q, 6.137), they received portions of agricultural produce from cultivators, and livestock from those who reared them.⁴⁰⁴ One would assume that such levies went to the section controlling a particular shrine, and that these were rendered during the holy season, and that, in addition to consecrated animals in a *ḥimā* or a *ḥujr*, proportions of the yield of land and livestock were allocated – an ubiquitous practice, in evidence at Taymā' and elsewhere in the Arabian Peninsula.⁴⁰⁵ At the heart of rites performed before these deities was another type of offering, that of sacrificial victims, quite apart from votive offerings, and the sacrifice of hair.⁴⁰⁶

Ritual slaughter was ubiquitous, and the ancient Arabs practised it widely.⁴⁰⁷ But there were also sacrifices that had no sanguine character, called *farā'i'*.⁴⁰⁸ Some sanctuaries may not have admitted the shedding of blood.⁴⁰⁹ There are areas in the Negev where sacred sites from the fifth and

⁴⁰² Ibn Sa'īd, *Nashwa*, 786; al-Damīrī, *al-Ḥayawān*, 1.194; *SH*, 1.164; 'Istiskā', *EI*; MbS, 1.177.

⁴⁰³ Robertson Smith, *Religion*, 264 f.; Wellhausen, *Reste*, 117; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 141.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣnām*, 43; Ibn Sa'īd, *Nashwa*, 791, 795. This has long been realised: Pococke, *Specimen historiae*, 108 f. See the material regarding one particular case, that of the Khawlāni deity 'Umyānis (*SIH*, 1.75) by Goldfeld, "Umyānis", 109 f., 113 ff., whose interpretation needs to be approached with caution in many respects. The Taymanite Ṣlm mhrm, once installed, also received a portion of palm gardens and a House of his own (Hausleiter, 'Divine representation', 302). The comparison with the Israelite *terumah* or with taxes exacted by south Arabian temples are only two of innumerable analogues that might be made for this ubiquitous phenomenon.

⁴⁰⁵ Abu al-Hasan, 'Royaume', 272 (one-tenth of the yield); al-Anṣārī, *al-Ḥaḍāra*, 88; *Routes d'Arabie*, 562.

⁴⁰⁶ On this last, Wellhausen, *Reste*, 124: hair cast into votive pits, or cast upon sacred trees, a practice not only tolerated by Muḥammad at al-Ḥudaybiyya, but actually performed by him in a red *qubba*, along with the sacrifice of seventy camels, duly scarified and wearing chaplets (WAQ, 615). On the components of sacrificial rites in general, see Chelod, *Sacrifice*, 69 f. Al-Bukhārī (*Ṣaḥīḥ*, 2.212 f., 220) gives accounts of the sequences of animal and hair sacrifices which are suggestive but somewhat unwieldy.

⁴⁰⁷ Ryckmans, *Religions*, 24; 'Sacrifice', 431 ff.; Dussaud, *Pénétration*, 40 ff.

⁴⁰⁸ See Chelod, *Sacrifice*, 96, and 'Consecration of animals', *EQ*, 1.401.

⁴⁰⁹ Gawlikowski, 'Allat et Baalshamīn', 302, with reference to Palmyra and al-Ṭā'if.

sixth centuries show no evidence of animal sacrifice, but rather evidence of libations and the votive destruction of precious items, such as millstones.⁴¹⁰ The idol at Dhū'l-Khalāṣa received libations of milk, offerings of wheat and barley, and ostrich eggs.⁴¹¹ It is well known that *ighlāq al-dhahr* and *al-'atīra* were practised – the mutilation of camels or sheep by hocking or by otherwise rendering them invalid, once a herd had reached a certain number, as offerings to the gods. Other animals were allowed to roam and graze without hindrance (*al-sā'iba*), for example a she-camel, sometimes accompanied by her daughter (*al-baḥīra*) under a similar arrangement, the differing practices likely to have reflected local practices or particular aims of sacrifice.⁴¹²

There is, nevertheless, ancient zooarchaeological evidence in the Arabian Peninsula of camel bones showing ritual methods of slaughter, and some show clearly the traces of burnt offering.⁴¹³ Safaitic inscriptions already mentioned holocausts.⁴¹⁴ Evidence closer at hand, the sacrifice and slaughter of camels by Bedouin people of the Sinai around Jabal Mūsā in the twentieth century, may suggest preservation of very archaic rituals of circumambulation and slaughter together,⁴¹⁵ the ancient customs being not altogether clear as to sequence and performance,⁴¹⁶ and in all likelihood proceeding with variants according to location. Many pagan Arab deities required blood sacrifice, and received it,⁴¹⁷ at particular times and places or as the occasion arose.

Like YHWH who demanded the first-born of sheep and bovines on the eighth day of birth (when he also required the foreskin of newborn males),⁴¹⁸ some unspecified Arab deities demanded the hundredth animal of a herd, or the last ten of a hundred sheep.⁴¹⁹ The blood of sacrificial

⁴¹⁰ Nevo, *Pagans and Herders*, 134; Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads*, 181 f.

⁴¹¹ Al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 78.

⁴¹² Ibn Sa'īd, *Nashwa*, 783; Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 330 ff.; al-Hillī, *Manāqib*, 314. Such a practice seems also to have been undertaken in response to drought: *AGH*, 16.260. See al-Sa'fī, *al-Qurbān*, 196 ff.; 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.201 ff. On the camel lore of the Arabs, see 'Ajīna, *Asāṭir*, 2.119 ff.

⁴¹³ Vogt, 'Death' – holocausts at 285. This information does not cover the Hijāz. Bin Ṣarāy (*al-Ibil*, 82 ff.) provides the most comprehensive tally of the graves of camels sacrificed (*baliyya*, *aqīra*, the latter term designating other sacrificial cattle as well as camels) at the death of their owners from the third millennium BC until c. 640 from Oman and eastern Arabia up to the region of Taymā' and Nabataean domains, including in one instance (94) the remains of a burnt camel.

⁴¹⁴ For instance, al-Aḥmad, *Muḥtama'*, 319, 320.

⁴¹⁵ Hobbs, *Mount Sinai*, 171. Moritz (*Sinaikult*, 59) confirms the slaughter of camels in Sinai, and suggests that the cult of al-'Uzzā had been replaced with the Muslim cult of al-Nabī Ṣāliḥ.

⁴¹⁶ On mechanisms of blood sacrifice, Chelhod, *Sacrifice*, ch. 9, *passim*.

⁴¹⁷ Krone, *al-Lār*, § 7.2.6; Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣṇām*, 33. ⁴¹⁸ Exodus 22.29.

⁴¹⁹ 'f-r-', *LA*; al-Tabrīzī, *Sharḥ*, 284 n. 51.

animals was daubed on the *nuṣub*,⁴²⁰ and one could presume that its innards were hung around it, all of which constituted the deity's portion of the sacrifice; the rest was consumed. Pagan Arabs also rubbed their bodies against the betyl or idol.⁴²¹ We know little of the cuisine of sacrifice, but we do know that the hides of sacrificed animals were given away.⁴²² In times of hardship, the flesh was distributed,⁴²³ possibly but not certainly consumed at a commensal meal during which meat was distributed by a combination of largesse and lots using sticks inscribed with shares, payment being a donation by the well-off for the needy,⁴²⁴ under the auspices of a *nuṣub*.⁴²⁵ The Qur'ān (3.183) disparages the idea of holocausts, which may indicate the presence of this practice, and the only animal sacrifice retained in Islamic *ḥajj* ritual slaughter⁴²⁶ was at Minā, during 'Īd al-Adḥā, at the end of the *ḥajj* – it is not insignificant that timing the Muslim Feast of the Sacrifice coincided with sacrifice at Minā.

None of this is unfamiliar or exceptional. Human sacrifices were not common among the pagan Arabs; their occurrence is only sparsely attested but ancient.⁴²⁷ They are often mentioned with reference to the cult of al-'Uzzā,⁴²⁸ but this needs to be geographically specified. The practice is explicitly attested at al-Ḥira.⁴²⁹ Such human sacrifice as existed seems to have involved prisoners of war, which was not of course peculiar to the Arabs. Arab sacrifice of captive enemies was famously illustrated by the Naṣrid al-Nu'mān b. al-Mundhir's sacrifice of the son of the Jafnid al-Ḥārith b. Jabala (r. 529(?)–569) to al-'Uzzā.⁴³⁰ But there is no evidence for this practice in inner Arabia. Whether or not the burying alive of infant

⁴²⁰ Al-Nābigha al-Dhubayānī, 7.19 in Arazi and Masalha, *Early Arab Poets*; Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishtiqāq*, 520.

⁴²¹ *SII*, § 133.

⁴²² Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 2.210 f., who maintains they were given away to charity, which probably reflects a Muslim transformation of the earlier practice of giving hides away to superintendents of sacrificial sites or to those who commanded the location.

⁴²³ For instance, the practice of Muḥammad: WAQ, 615.

⁴²⁴ The material was assembled in detail and discussed in lexical and etymological perspective by al-Biqā'ī, 'Naẓm al-Durar', 29 ff., amplified by al-Zabīdī, 'Nashwat al-Irtiyāḥ', 46 ff. Ibn Qutayba (*Maysir*, 56 ff., 113 ff.) describes the procedure in great detail, including the way in which the victim was cut and distributed – see the comment of Fahd, *Divination*, 207 ff. and Jamil, 'Playing for time', 49 and *passim*. *Maysir* and *istiḡsām*, a method also used in divination, will be discussed later: 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.776 ff.; Bell, *Commentary*, 1.148; Chelhod, *Sacrifice*, 192 ff.

⁴²⁵ Ibn Qutayba, *Maysir*, 41. ⁴²⁶ Cf. Wellhausen, *Reste*, 120.

⁴²⁷ A Dadanitic inscription from al-'Ulā consecrates a young man, *Glm*, by the name of *Slm* (*Sālim?), for immolation as an offering to the deity Dhū Ghābat: JS, Lih 49; the sense of immolation is confirmed by M. Macdonald (personal communication).

⁴²⁸ Segal, 'Arabs', 113; Nöldeke, 'Arabs', 1.665.2; Henninger, 'Menschenopfer', 734 ff. and *passim*; Chelhod, *Sacrifice*, 98.

⁴²⁹ On which see Morony, *Iraq*, 387, 387 n. 20.

⁴³⁰ Al-Ḥillī, *Manāqib*, 438; Ibn Sa'īd, *Nashwa*, 1.68. For a bizarre variation, see AGH, 22.62.

girls (*wa'd*), specified with unhelpful generality as practised by Muḍar and Rabī'a except Kināna,⁴³¹ was a sacrifice to divinities, the intended victims being duly decked out for the purpose, and admitting animal substitutes,⁴³² or rather some form of insurance against the indignity of penury in hard times, is hard to determine.⁴³³ Moreover, it is highly uncertain if pagan Arabs vowed to sacrifice their sons. The famous story of 'Abd al-Maṭṭalib wishing to sacrifice a son chosen by lot, only to be persuaded by the oracle of Hubal to substitute a hundred camels for him, seems to be cast according to the Biblical legend of Abraham,⁴³⁴ and to have been used in Muslim traditions as an aetiological legend for substituting material restitution for talion.⁴³⁵

Labbayka: invoking divinity

Sacrifices and votive offerings on their own are only part of cult ritual, for such ritual, a 'sort of mystic mechanics',⁴³⁶ was meant to invoke the power and intervention of the deity. Cultic ritual also required the use of words, in correct form and order, formulaically and repetitively expressed,⁴³⁷ designed to unlock the energies and capacities of the powers invoked, lodged in a name, an object and a location.⁴³⁸ Litanies and cultic invocations in the setting of seasonal ceremonies such as pilgrimages, or rites that took place at more regular intervals and indeed ad hoc rites, were as much a part of cultic ceremonies as were bodily movements and the observance of correct times and places.⁴³⁹ It was only with regularity and with the increasing

⁴³¹ MbS, 1.593 – the killing of daughters in south Arabia was the subject of epigraphic prohibition in the second century BC: Robin, 'Du paganisme', 141 ff.

⁴³² See the most interesting analysis of al-Sa'fī, *al-Qurbān*, 23 ff, 29, 29 n. 2, 38, with comparisons to Greek myth, and cf. Chelhod, *Sacrifice*, 99. Al-Ṣāwayyān ('al-Badāwa', 86) suggests that this practice may be the equivalent of the sacrifice of camels after a certain number is reached by a herd.

⁴³³ See Chelhod, *Sacrifice*, 98 f. Reports about Ṣa'sa'a b. 'Iqāl of B. Mujāshī' (the grandfather of the Umayyad poet al-Farazdaq) buying up infants girls meant for burial (Ibn Durayd, *al-Iṣṭiqāq*, 239) may well sustain this view, which would connect the practice with that of *i'tifād* mentioned in the previous chapter.

⁴³⁴ *SII*, §§ 20 ff.; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1.79 f. Different details in *SH*, 1.54 f. See the textual and anthropological discussion of al-Sa'fī, *al-Qurbān*, 101 ff., 107 ff. The motif of sacrificing a son, and related themes of wandering and childlessness, are ubiquitous in world literature and mythology: 'Abraham', *EM*.

⁴³⁵ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārikh*, 1.252. ⁴³⁶ Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 419.

⁴³⁷ See especially von Severus, 'Gebēt I', 1135 f. (on general patterns), 1136 ff. (Greek and Roman formulae), 1163 ff. (Israelite and Jewish material).

⁴³⁸ The imperative form used in Safaitic supplications and curses had already been noted by Grimme, *Texte*, 146 f.

⁴³⁹ On bodily movements, such as the raising of hands or palms, kneeling, and so forth: von Severus, 'Gebēt I', 1158 ff., 1216 ff.

elaboration of the social differentiation of religious practice that litanies and invocations became prayers properly so called.⁴⁴⁰

When approaching a deity, both in the immediate vicinity of its presence or starting with the location of entry into ritual condition, *iḥrām*, each group of worshippers expressed their intention of acclaiming, and therefore invoking,⁴⁴¹ the divinity by pronouncing collectively and loudly a litany termed *talbiya*, usually but not exclusively in the mode of *rajaz*. Other modes of address were also made, known as *takbīr* and *tahlīl*,⁴⁴² hallelujatic acclamations the latter of which might be understood in connection with *ihlāl*, the timing, connected to lunation, for the commencement of ceremonies, duly generalised. The *talbiya*, whose name was clearly coined from the standard incantation *labbayka*, *Allāhumma, labbayka*,⁴⁴³ reasserted formulaically attendance before the deity, obedience, praise, veneration and a generally formulated supplication.⁴⁴⁴

These incantations that followed the *talbiya*, each attributed to a specific tribe or section or to devotees of different tutelary deities, contained special pleading, and some reflected inter-communal competition, differences and enmities.⁴⁴⁵ They seem to have involved collective refrains to formulae pronounced by the leader.⁴⁴⁶ There were special formulae spoken specifically

⁴⁴⁰ Von Severus, 'Gebete I', 1135.

⁴⁴¹ The notion of intent in this connection is preserved in later Muslim ritual law. This and other features of addressing the divinity to be discussed conform to the standard formal and pragmatic linguistic modes of address described by Keane, 'Religious language,' 50 ff.

⁴⁴² See the comments of Klinke-Rosenberger, *Götzenbuch*, 75 n. 34.

⁴⁴³ *Labbayka* is a word of obscure meaning. Arabic dictionaries tend to give it metaphorical senses, based on contextual and morphological rather than lexematic considerations, deriving from the context of its use, and generally conveying the sense of attendance. See Abū Raḥma, 'Qirā'a', 100. The exclamation *labbayka*, announcing presence in service, was used in non-religious and non-ritual contexts as well: WAQ, 815; AGH, 9.63.

⁴⁴⁴ By far the best and fullest study, with comment on sources and existing scholarship mentioned below and with reference to terminology compared to contemporary usage, is Abū Raḥma, 'Qirā'a'. For a listing and quotation of these litanies of invocation, see Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbbar*, 311 ff. al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 1.255 f. and Qutrub, *Azmina*, 116 ff.; some textual variations are indicated by Tritton, 'Notes on religion'. Formal analysis, particularly of metrical characteristics, and more detail, in al-Ma'arrī, *Risālat al-Ghufrān*, 534 ff. A compendious collection of these texts, with interpretation, was assembled by Husain ('Talbiyat al-Jahiliyya'), enhanced, edited on the basis of an Istanbul manuscript of MbS prior to the editing and publication of this book, and further analysed by Kister, 'Labbayka' (numbered Arabic texts at 50–57), who also looks (at 35 f., 47), into the history of redaction of these texts, which he believes (following Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Pèlerinage*, 183) were only established in the second Hijra century. Seidensticker ('Sources', 297 ff., 302 ff.) classifies these texts according to source, and considers the vast majority to be inauthentic, especially as they make reference to divine epithets that are Islamic: this of course begs the question of what is Islamic and what is not. On the formal linguistic features of these litanies, Furayjāt, *al-Shu'ara'*, 38 f. See also Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 307 f.

⁴⁴⁵ For instance, Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbbar*, 313, noted by Kister, 'Labbayka', 45.

⁴⁴⁶ Exemplified by Muḥammad: Abū Raḥma, 'Qirā'a', 103.

by women.⁴⁴⁷ Many contained statements of a propitiatory nature, and the request for permission for access to, and for presence in, a sacred enclave. The *talbiya* of Ghassān and Ḥimyar contained prayers for their kings and votive statements on their behalf.⁴⁴⁸

Moreover, some of these litanies have a Paleo-Islamic flavour, which may suggest that they had been slightly edited by redactors to convey an impression more in keeping with their understanding of a primeval monotheism latent among the Arabs, to which commentators seem to have paid scant attention.⁴⁴⁹ There is mention of Allāh in the *talbiya* of the Ashʿarites, of al-Raḥmān in that of Qays ʿAylān, Judhām and the Ashʿarites, use of a number of epithets later applied to Allāh, use of the term *andād* in the *talbiya* of Maʿdī Karib, statements that the unnamed Lord invoked had mastery over other deities and idols left behind for the occasion, as well as mention of the terms *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*.⁴⁵⁰

Ḥalāl and *ḥarām* may well have been a later redaction of *ḥill* and *ḥurm* used in the *talbiya* of Qudāʿa, connected with the regime of ritual purity during the holy season.⁴⁵¹ For the rest, the senses and uses of Allāh and al-Raḥmān will be discussed in detail in the next chapter in a way that will reveal a picture quite other than one that might justify the common presumption of some kind of primal monotheism, or at least conceptions that prepared the way for monotheism.⁴⁵² There is no justification to interpret this material as pointing to 'a supreme god', an analogue of El ʿOlam or El ʿElyon lurking systemically behind all others,⁴⁵³ or indeed *theos hypsistos*.⁴⁵⁴

The use of the term Allāhumma at the beginning of all *talbiya* litanies does not justify presuming belief in one cosmocratic deity presiding over the universe and human affairs, remotely controlling satrap deities resident in idols and designated by divine names. Allāhumma is neither an epithet nor the name of a divinity, still less an invocation of Allāh, and cannot be regarded as the generic name of deity in general.⁴⁵⁵ It was a generic

⁴⁴⁷ Kister, 'Labbayka', 41, quoting Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Munammaq*, 272, and al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 124 f.

⁴⁴⁸ Quṭrub, *al-Azmina*, 122; Kister, 'Labbayka', no. 54. Problems of attribution do arise, and some formulae can be confusing in this regard: Abū Raḥma, 'Qirāʿa', 102 f.

⁴⁴⁹ There is among the litanies extant one *talbiya* by Adam: Kister, 'Labbayka', 45, who justifiably takes this for a Muslim redaction.

⁴⁵⁰ Kister, 'Labbayka', nos. 37, 38, 46, 48, 49, 52, 56 and *passim*; Quṭrub, *al-Azmina*, 125.

⁴⁵¹ Kister, 'Labbayka', no. 7.

⁴⁵² Husain, 'Talbiyat al-Jahiliyya', 364, followed by Kister, 'Labbayka', 34.

⁴⁵³ As with Kister, 'Labbayka', 48. ⁴⁵⁴ Crone, 'Religion', 181, 189.

⁴⁵⁵ But it was later used by early Paleo-Muslims as an epithet as well as a generic designator, before the name Allāh was properly established, a sense that was later retained: see Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 12 f., where evidence is presented for the use of this as a proper name, once Allāh had achieved

epiclesis used to invoke all deities named in the *talbiya* texts and others unnamed, suitable for a henotheistic position at a particular ritual moment after the manner already discussed; it has already been suggested that the attribution of oneness to a deity in a henotheistic setting was common.⁴⁵⁶ The single *talbiya* text using the epithet ‘the One’ needs to be interpreted in this sense;⁴⁵⁷ thus when the treaty of al-Ḥudaybiyya between Muḥammad and his Meccan adversaries was being drafted, he wished to preface it by the invocation of Allāh and al-Raḥmān. The Meccan negotiator Suhayl b. ‘Amr preferred the invocation of the more generic Allāhumma, stating that this was the customary form which, in one version of this report, he said Muḥammad himself had used previously,⁴⁵⁸ clearly perceiving it could avert complications brought about by mention of individual divinities.

This point had been well perceived by Arab grammarians. Al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad made the point that Allāhumma was a vocative appellation, in a somewhat contrived but purely morphological and grammatical argument,⁴⁵⁹ intended to show that the term was a compound with the divine name Allāh. But this argument does not make much morphological or semantic sense. There is no reason to assume the term to have been related to Allāh, using this divine name with a suffix, although the element *-m* is comparable to the vocative *h-* in a variety of ANA languages when suffixed as an asseverative article to *Lh* or *Lt* in Hismaic, for instance.⁴⁶⁰ In Thamūdīc E texts, the element *h* seems to be attested as an element in invocations of the divine.⁴⁶¹

Closer to home, the phoneme *ha*, like *ta*, *wa*, and *bi*, acts as a vocative particle.⁴⁶² As in the relation between Allāt and the definite article *al-* in Arabic discussed above, the problem is not only morphological but

indivisible divinity. A Paleo-Muslim inscription in the Negev asserts that Allāhumma’s Throne is in heaven, and the earth is his foot-rest (*mawḍī’ qadamih*): inscription MA 4254 (17) in Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads*, 378. See MbS, 2.20 f., 3.272, 708 and Vitestam, ‘Arsh’. Cf. Isaiah 66.1–2, Acts 7.49.

⁴⁵⁶ See Vesnel, ‘Thrice one’, 88, 88 n. 22, 121 ff. ⁴⁵⁷ Abū Raḥma, ‘Qirā’a’, 116.

⁴⁵⁸ US, no. 225; WAQ, 610. ⁴⁵⁹ Sibawayh, *Kitāb*, 2.196.

⁴⁶⁰ Macdonald, ‘Ancient North Arabian’, 519 – one might also mention the *ha-* and *-lumma* elements in the classical Arabic *halumma* (let’s go!), and more generally the possible use of *ha-* as a vocative particle, *ḥarf tanbīh*. But this matter was a controversial one among Arab grammarians, and the *ha* may well have served as an energetic particle, with *humma* as an imperative form of the verb *ʾlm*. There are cognates in Hebrew (*halom* as ‘hither, here’) and Ugaritic (the adverb *hlm* with a similar meaning), suggesting that the *-m* is an integral part of the word rather than a suffix – personal communications from Ramzi Baalbaki and Michael Macdonald. See also ‘Allāhumma’, Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*.

⁴⁶¹ King, *Thamudic E*, 79.

⁴⁶² ‘h’, LA; Khan, *Exegetischen Teile*, 304. All are used in oaths: Pedersen, *Eid*, 14. For examples, see TAB, 379; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 3.235.

also chronological. Allāhumma has an Ugaritic parallel,⁴⁶³ in the form *ʾlhm* occurring in ritual texts as discrete entities receiving sacrifice.⁴⁶⁴ In Thamūdīc E inscriptions, the particle *m* is used in invocations involving *Lh* only (and not *Lt*),⁴⁶⁵ reinforcing the suggestion made here that morphology might not be the way for understanding forms of *ʾlhm* that are in evidence, but that it should be considered as a realised morphemic and graphemic unit. That Allāh later monopolised the epiclesis Allāhumma came as he acquired not only the prerogative of exclusive divinity, but also the epithets appropriate to all deities.

The *talbiya* acclamation, and its invocation of Alāhumma, far from indicating an incipient monolatry or even, according to some, monotheism, is therefore rather a generic, intensified and superlative affirmation of devotion, used for a variety of deities and for any deity, in a way that was context-dependent and that has analogues in acclamations of *heis theos* and other epithetic names in many parts of the Roman empire.⁴⁶⁶ It was a relative superlative in a setting of social and divine competition, and might be assumed to have carried validity at particular ritual moments only. Addressing a deity as one in a situation such as this, as *heis*, *wāhid* or *aḥad*, employs the term in relation to number, not as a definite article. It has no theological presuppositions or implications. *Sondergötter* are highly personal and individual, but are also subject to the ritual calendar for the affirmation of their functional and efficacious divinity. This is all perfectly consistent with the structures of polytheism.

The *talbiya* litanies invoked a variety of tutelary deities. We do not know which of the litanies extant were used during the Meccan season, and which at other times. Many clearly invoked the deity specific to a time and rite, the sacred time of the Meccan pilgrimages, the Lord of the House, which does not mean that no other deities were invoked. If these litanies did indeed speak of the subordination of their deities to the unnamed Lord of the House, this can only be interpreted as a subordination asserted at one specific moment, for the immediate purposes of the rite performed, without any implication of a systematic taxonomy of the divine. There is no reason to suppose that declarations of exclusive

⁴⁶³ 'Allāhumma', Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*. Healey ('Ugarit') discusses a variety of features common to Arabic, ANA, South Arabian and Ugaritic.

⁴⁶⁴ 'Eloah', *DDD*, 285.

⁴⁶⁵ King, *Thamudic E*, 80, who also suggests that Allāhumma is a possible parallel, wondering whether this might not involve the use of the particle *m* as a substitute for the vocative *yā*; but this seems to be on the assumption that the epiclesis is a compound with Allāh which, I am arguing, is an unnecessary and untenable assumption.

⁴⁶⁶ Belayche, 'Deus deum', 147 ff., 160 f.; Chaniotis, 'Megatheism', 127, 128 and 21 ff.

worship made to the deity being worshipped and addressed by a *talbiya* litany implied that other deities did not exist, or that they would not be worshipped at other times and in other settings, or that they would not have a similar *talbiya* pronounced before them as well. Moreover, that deities were said to have had auxiliaries at certain points of performance does not necessarily imply a theological subordinationism; the so-called Daughters of Allāh would,⁴⁶⁷ if they indeed existed or were invoked as such, fit into this context, possibly involving a notion of intercession, *shafā'a*. This is a notion modelled upon the capacities of influential individuals,⁴⁶⁸ acting as equals, and builds upon a magical substrate whereby capacities are transferred between divine personalities sympathetically, as they are transferred to cultic auxiliaries like the cross, the icon, the Torah scroll, fragments of the Qur'ān or a heavenly body.

Litanies generally invoked powers in favour of votaries. But they could also be directed against enemies, in the form of curses, set in the perfect tense and, like praise and oaths, composed in alliterative pairs,⁴⁶⁹ often in *rajaz*, repeated and accompanied with physical gestures.⁴⁷⁰ It has been supposed that poetic lampoons had their origins in this magical deployment of voice and word,⁴⁷¹ with the imprecations of the poet, inspired by a *jinni*, launched like arrows at the enemy,⁴⁷² but there is little evidence for this. Nevertheless, a curse, like an imprecation, travels under the steam of the person who uttered it, and might be seen to persist as a disembodied utterance,⁴⁷³ like the *hātaf* of the *jinn*, thus connecting the world of men with that of the unseen, as does the ritual invocation.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁶⁷ Robin ('Filles de Dieu', 115 f., 138) brings out evidence of Daughters of 'Īl in Yemen, being undifferentiated divine persons like angels and demons. See also Crone, 'Religion', 156 ff.

⁴⁶⁸ Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 56 f.

⁴⁶⁹ On linguistic features, in an overall Semitic languages context, Pedersen, *Eid*, 80 ff., 86 f., 91. For general linguistic features of predication in addressing divinities, von Severus, 'Gebet I', 1157. For an analysis of Qur'ānic oath clusters, see 'Rhetoric and the Qur'ān', *EQ*, 4.464 ff. Curses persisted for a while in Muslim inscriptions: Barāmkī, *al-Nuqūsh*, no. 58.

⁴⁷⁰ For repetition, physical gestures and somatic correlates in such settings, see Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 34 f., and Mainberger, *Kunst*, 322 f., who likens this type of repetition to elementary forms of music.

⁴⁷¹ Goldziher, 'Bemerkungen zur ältesten Geschichte der arabischen Poesie', *Gesammelte Schriften*, 4.226–8.

⁴⁷² Zwettler, 'Mantic manifesto', 79.

⁴⁷³ Pedersen, *Eid*, 77, and cf. Goldziher, *Abhandlungen*, 118, and Zwettler, 'Mantic manifesto', 79.

⁴⁷⁴ Thus, when Muḥammad went on campaign to al-Ḥijr/Mada'in Šālīḥ, which he believed had been cursed as Thamūd were destroyed, he masked his face, and ordered his follows not to enter the structures in evidence there, nor to drink from any wells there available: al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.181, 6.9, and see also Sterkevych, *Golden Bough*, 18. When angry at a man, Muḥammad is reported to have stated that he was about to send upon him a curse that would follow him to his grave (WAQ, 683).

Gestures and abstentions

It must be stressed that in these settings of invocation and sacrifice, little is known of prayer, which is sociologically and ritually a distinct form of addressing the divine, although prayers do include elements of invocation almost invariably, and end, as in Christianity, in a sacrificial act.⁴⁷⁵ It is therefore pointless to look here for the provenance of later Muslim prayer arrangements, unless one infers, not implausibly, various forms and degrees of prostration (*sujūd*), of which we have some mention.⁴⁷⁶ Veneration and worship involved processions and circumambulations; they also included kissing the idol or betyl, and the occasional stoning of other cult objects,⁴⁷⁷ probably at the time cairns,⁴⁷⁸ which persists in the Muslim *hajj*. Other, seemingly bizarre rites were practised by women, such as rubbing buttocks against Dhū'l-Khalāṣa, an act derided by Muḥammad – perhaps a rite concerned with fertility. But this must surely be only the tip of the iceberg.

Further, such rites generally required conditions of ritual purity and accoutrement. We have already encountered different types of clothing and states of dress and undress associated with the circumambulation of the Ka'ba, called *iḥrām*, and certain alimentary regimes associated with this,⁴⁷⁹ many in keeping with conditions of abstinence related to war and revenge discussed above. Whether abstention from swine flesh and the practice of circumcision with which the Arabs are universally credited had the religious connotations that may have attended the origins of these practices remains uncertain.⁴⁸⁰

There is both Thamūdīc and north Ḥijāzī evidence for the ritual shaving of heads and the plucking of body hair in cultic settings.⁴⁸¹ Generally

⁴⁷⁵ Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1.422; Ryckmans, *Religions arabes*, II.

⁴⁷⁶ For instance, the poem of al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī, *Dīwān*, 2.II–12, referring to a woman so beautiful as to cause even a wizened monk to prostrate himself.

⁴⁷⁷ Lammens, *Arabie*, 105 f; Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣnām*, p. 33; Krone, *al-Lāt*, § 7.2.1-5; Healey, *Religion*, 163.

⁴⁷⁸ Stoning, *rajm*, is connected to cairns, called *rijām*, when so arranged as to constitute cultic betyls, with circumambulation and a variety of other standard movements of the votive body. See al-Tabrīzī, *Sharḥ*, 153 n. 1.

⁴⁷⁹ Q, 7.26 and MbS, 2.32 f.; Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Munammaq*, 143 ff.; al-Fāṣī, *Shifā'*, 2.41 ff. The connection is made by Chelhod (*Sacrifice*, 100 ff.) and Lammens (*Arabie*, 181 ff.), but one needs to be cautious about accepting any interpretation in terms of ancestor worship.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 329; Sozomenos, *Historia*, 6.38.11, and see also 6.38.13 for a comment on relations with Hebrew practices with regard to the Tanūkh: Malley, *Hellenism and Christianity*, 157. For Palmyra, see Kaizer, *Religious Life*, 185 ff., 236. This applies to male circumcision. There are indications of the minor female circumcision involving the excision of the clitoris; how this practice may have been distributed geographically and socially is unknown.

⁴⁸¹ Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣnām*, 14 (reference to the cult of Manāt); Winnett *et al.*, *Ancient Records*, no. 41 f.; Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 353 (cult of the Meccan Ka'ba). Goldziher ('Sacrifice de la chevelure', *Gesammelte*

speaking, these have been understood in terms of purity rites, rather than in terms of sacrifice. Such practices were later to be ascribed to Abraham in Muslim traditions, and the shaving of heads upon entering a holy enclosure is enjoined by the Qurʾān (Q, 48.27) and is retained till this day in the Muslim pilgrimage rites at Mecca. Little more is known of such practices. Some Muslim sources that record what Islam retained from paganism also mention the ritual washing of the dead and washing following sexual intercourse.⁴⁸²

One last matter relating to purity and abstention needs to be mentioned before proceeding further. There are indications of practices of individual abstention, called *al-ṣārūra*, whereby an individual might embrace ascetic practices temporarily, including the renunciation of sexual intercourse.⁴⁸³ Some members of Quraysh are said to have abstained from drink and gaming,⁴⁸⁴ but this should not necessarily be taken always to imply a persistent regimen rather than temporary abstention related to rites of purification associated with expiation, war or the exaction of vengeance. There is much information in sources, some with clearly legendary detail, about abstinent individuals such as Quss b. Sāʿida and Riʿāb b. al-Barāʾ, construed anachronistically according to images of piety, and much by way of sayings, some gnomological, some of indefinable religious flavour, some in *sajʿ*, ascribed to them.⁴⁸⁵ The importance of oratory has already been signalled, and Muḥammad's oratorical activity may be seen in continuity with the role Quss and others played.⁴⁸⁶

Schriften, 2.151–4) assembles some material for the sacrifice of hair when at war, and before exacting revenge, in both cases following religious ceremonies. Henninger ('Zur Frage des Haaropfers bei den Semiten', *Arabica Sacra*, 286 ff.) prefers an interpretation in terms of liminality rather than sacrifice.

⁴⁸² For instance, Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 309 ff. See the discussions of Wensinck ('Animismus', 220 ff. and 'Entstehung', 64 ff, 58 ff., 75 ff.), which concentrate more on relationship to Jewish than to pagan ritual. On washing and enshrouding the dead, especially the face, and related funerary matters, see Jacob, *Beduinleben*, 141 f. and Abdeselem, *Thème de la mort*, 88 ff. A plant called *al-idhkhar* was used for scenting graves (WAQ, 836), which may ordinarily have been shallow, with some stones or a rough cairn piled up upon them (*AGH*, 16.41 – and cf. Lammens, 'Culte', 98 f.).

⁴⁸³ 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.218 f.; one Wakī' b. Salama al-Iyādī is reported to have done this, and to have built himself a structure reminiscent of those of stylites (Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 136), possibly inspired by Christian hermits or monks.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Munammaq*, 531 f. Epigraphic evidence points to drinking prohibition around the cult of Shay' al-Qawn in Palmyra (Maraqtan, 'Wine', 109 f.), but this seems to have been very unusual.

⁴⁸⁵ See the historical reconstruction, including possible geographical locations of origin and activity, in Sa'id, *Anbiyā'*, 136 ff., 205 ff., who notes (at 140 ff.) the persistent tendency to Christianise the name of Quss by reading it as Qiss. For texts ascribed to Quss, see al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān*, 1.308 f. and Ibn Sa'id, *Nashwa*, 668 ff.

⁴⁸⁶ See Jones, 'Language', 32.

But more generally, there seems to have been a regime of temporary abstention called *taḥannuth* accompanied by retreat (*i'tikāf*),⁴⁸⁷ analogous to the ascetic aspects of vows of vengeance described above. This was practised, one must assume, as an expiatory or votive ritual and a form of penance, accompanied by acts of charity (*birr*), including the manumission of slaves, and, it has been suggested, rituals of circumambulation.⁴⁸⁸ This regime of abstention, one would assume, occurred after some private infraction (followed by punishment) or public calamity. This is suggested by the lexical motivation of *taḥannuth*, indicating the reversal of *ḥinth*, the violation of a vow, oath or duty,⁴⁸⁹ quite apart from the glosses of later Muslim scholarship, connecting it with pious worship, *ta'abbud*, as the *praeparatio* of *taḥannuf*, and claiming it to have been a month-long annual practice by Muḥammad.⁴⁹⁰

In order properly to interpret such practices without anachronism, one might well recall that the disaster that befell Thamūd resulted primarily from a cultic infraction (the hamstringing of a consecrated animal), and pursue comparison with south Arabian conditions. There, penitential inscriptions containing public expiatory confessions related expiatory actions to calamities occurring (for instance, bodily afflictions) as a result of infringing regimes of ritual purity at the time of performing rituals, such as pollution with blood, including menstrual blood,⁴⁹¹ semen, sexual delicts or pilfering temple treasures; the myth of Isāf and Nā'ila having been humans who were turned to stone following sexual delicts in the Meccan

⁴⁸⁷ See 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.509 f.

⁴⁸⁸ See Kister, 'Al-Taḥannuth', 231 ff. Later, in the Muslim religion, penance was to be called *kaffāra*, and involved a variety of actions, including the manumission of slaves, abstentions, sacrifices, feeding the poor and other acts of charity. Q, 58.3–4 speaks of a pagan practice of repudiating a wife then reclaiming her, without further ado, which Muḥammad seems to have admitted exceptionally under the circumstances of one particular case (of Khawla bint Tha'laba, according to traditional exegesis – Bell, *Commentary*, 2.357) provided the man freed a slave, or alternatively fasted for two continuous months or fed sixty paupers.

⁴⁸⁹ Q, 38.44, 56.54 uses the term in its verbal and nominal forms. Ibn Sida interprets the use of the positive *taḥannuth* to the negative *ḥinth* in terms of similar semantic inversions in the Arabic lexicon: 'ḥ-n-th', *LA*. See also Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 44. That in later Muslim jurisprudence *ḥinth* came to acquire more differentiated senses (Calder, 'Hinth', 236) – liability with respect to an oath, swearing a positive oath, breaking a negative oath or becoming liable to a conditional oath – may well reflect the formalisation and further elaboration of the early Meccan situation sketched.

⁴⁹⁰ These glosses are brought out by Kister, 'Al-Taḥannuth', 225 ff., and listed in 'ḥ-n-th', *LA*. Calder ('Hinth') believes this reflects the semantics of legal discussions of vows in the second century AH. This view may be justified for the glosses upon the word. But it does not necessarily imply that the term was not used for a pre-Islamic practice.

⁴⁹¹ Menstruating women were not allowed entry to holy places in south Arabia, were barred from standing before Isāf and, according to Muslim practices, were excluded from circumambulation and *sa'ī* at Mecca, although 'A'isha did once get special dispensation from Muḥammad. See Howard, 'Aspects', 42.

ḥaram is an echo of this. The vocabulary used is in many cases cognate with that of Arabic, later to become Islamic: *ṭwb* for recompense, *ndr* for vows. There is every reason to assume the existence of analogous conditions in central and western Arabia, as this is a very general phenomenon. There seems no need, contrary to a very common view, to speak of a Jewish origin for such regimes of purity that were violated, regimes which are very well attested among the pagan Arabs, and of salience to the rituals discussed above.⁴⁹²

Muḥammad's famous periods of *taḥannuth* at the cave of Hira' (in fact, not a cave as much as a space between two boulders, with openings on either side, and very difficult of access at a precipitous edge of Jabal al-Nūr), where he is said to have received his call to prophecy, took place on the nights of *dhawāt al-ʿadad* mentioned above.⁴⁹³ More precise reports about timing are wanting, and one cannot decide whether the times for Muḥammad's retreats and possible vigils were associated with any specific cultic calendar, or whether they were performed ad hoc. Precisely what he had done that required expiation cannot be determined; how he may have been punished by the deities, be this repayment the tortures of conscience or torments of a toothache, is entirely obscure, although acts of what in the eyes of Quraysh and their deities would have been regarded as acts of sacrilege, before Muḥammad's definitive break with them, offer an attractive explanation, and would tally with material to be explored in the next chapter. That Allāh made contact with him in this setting is all the more plausible for a spirit that was still divided.⁴⁹⁴ The practice indicates certain ritual moments that would have been considered appropriate for this, and would thus have formed part of the temporal and spatial cultic regime discussed, not as acts of privately impelled piety as ordinarily understood,⁴⁹⁵ still less as acts of

⁴⁹² Ryckmans, 'Confessions', 1 ff., 5, 7, 8 f., 14.

⁴⁹³ Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1.165; *SIH*, 1.218; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.3, 3.62 ff., 66 f. – the timing is uncertain, and it is difficult to reconcile the different accounts. 'Ā'isha is also reported to have practised *i'tikāf* at Mount Thabir; such retreats on hills surrounding Mecca continued into the ninth century (Calder, *Hinth*, 232).

⁴⁹⁴ This divided self may have been indicated by possibly early uses of *al-muddaththir*, the Enshrouded One, for Muḥammad, glossing the Qur'ānic use of the term which is connected to his receipt of inspiration. This pejorative interpretation may have referred metaphorically to Muḥammad's uncertainty towards or indeed flight from the receipt of revelation: Rubin, 'Shrouded messenger', 100 f., 105 f.

⁴⁹⁵ Kister ('Al-Taḥannuth', 228 ff.) is perfectly justified in arguing against conventional interpretations of *taḥannuth*, including that of piety. But the assumption that Hira' (*ibid.*, 235) was the site of devotions by some specific religious groups of Quraysh seems unjustified. In the same vein, the assumption that the so-called Hunafā', discussed below, were 'deist ascetics' or 'religious seekers' (Wellhausen, *Reste*, 234; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 448) is without justification (cf. Hawting, *Idolatry*, 43 f.), as is also the futile attempt to consider them a consolidated pre-Islamic sect (Bell, *Commentary*, 1.26).

proto-Muslim piety. The riposte to *hīnth* in *taḥannuth* would also imply that relations with deities may have been construed covenantally, over and above the conception of reciprocity of favour implied by cultic worship.

That Muḥammad disapproved of extreme ascetic practices during his Meccan period⁴⁹⁶ is testimony to the well-contained nature of *taḥannuth* practices, and that the practices of denial associated with it were not a form of pious asceticism as much as an occasional condition resorted to in specific circumstances.

Diviners, divination, spells

In all these procedures, cult personnel seem to be virtually absent, cult being generally officiated by the social superior. A special type of cultic helper, of despised social status, assisted with the drawing of lots before a deity. Known as *al-ḥarda*, this person is reported to have abstained from flesh altogether except when supplied by others.⁴⁹⁷ Beyond this, little is known of the ritual requirements of persons who officiated at cult rituals, and there is indeed no evidence of specialised cult personnel in central and west Arabia, let alone a priestly class distinguished by function, hierarchy, prerogatives and dress, in contrast to areas further north⁴⁹⁸ and perhaps to Yemen, both more elaborate polities with fairly stable systems of centralisation, organisation and control.⁴⁹⁹

There did exist terms designating experts in matters related to religion, in various places across the desert and steppe, most particularly *afkal* and *kāhin/kāhina* (fem.).⁵⁰⁰ The evidence is both epigraphic and literary, although it must be said that it seems certain that the *kāhin* appears largely to belong to a different class of religious specialists than those associated with specific cult. The term *nabī* means, in Islamic Arabic, 'prophet' strictly speaking and applied to Muḥammad and, perhaps as a consequence, is absent from Muslim writings about pagan Arabs (and to my knowledge

⁴⁹⁶ Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 115, with reference to 'Uthmān b. Ma'zūn, a possible leader of emigration to Ethiopia.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 333; 'h-r-d', *LA*; Ibn Qutayba, *Maysir*, 128.

⁴⁹⁸ This must include northern Arabia, where Minaic inscriptions show evidence of a priesthood: JS, Minaean 19.7, 24.1, 27.3. JS reading of *lw't at 24.1 as 'Levite' in the feminine gender is unlikely (M. Macdonald, personal communication). See also Henninger, *Arabica Sacra*, 228 f. But this material refers to much earlier times.

⁴⁹⁹ Butcher, *Roman Syria*, 330 f.; Kaizer, *Religious Life*, 234 ff.; Healey, *Religion*, 163 ff. – but see, for Yemen in an earlier period, Pirenne, 'RShW'. It is noteworthy that pagan priests around the arc of the Fertile Crescent seem to have had such a uniform manner of dress, white tunics and tall white caps: Lucian, *Dea Syria*, § 42; Healey, *Religion*, 164 and the fresco in *Syrie. Mémoire et civilisation*, 291 – but see Kaizer, *Religious Life*, 235.

⁵⁰⁰ Hoyland, *Arabia*, 159 ff.; Krone, *al-Lāt*, 427 ff., 437 ff. In the Arabic lexicon, *afkal* designates a 'quaker', literally: 'f-k-l', *LA*.

absent from inscriptions).⁵⁰¹ It is important to bear in mind that prophecy, as against clairvoyance, is a personal calling not often embedded in the institutional or quasi-institutional arrangements in place.⁵⁰² Muḥammad's prophetic gifts as distinct from his status as God's Apostle have not been studied with deliberation, and there is clearly here much material that is in need of exploration and interpretation.⁵⁰³

In closer connection with cult is the office of the *sādin*, superintendent and keeper of a *haram*. As suggested, each clan worshipping a particular idol or betyl (including groups of such cult objects, as in the enclave of the Meccan Ka'ba) normally included a lineage, not necessarily a distinguished one, in which this office was transmitted, and we have lists of these.⁵⁰⁴ Clearly, such transmission of *sadāna* was not devoid of social conflict, as is well illustrated by the conflictual control over the Meccan Ka'ba on which there is ample material,⁵⁰⁵ much of it clearly legendary, but nevertheless telling. With this function of guardianship over a shrine are associated others, involving gaming and the speculative side of divination by lots and oracles.⁵⁰⁶

The function of providing the setting for divination was an important one. The Arabs, as indicated, had long been given to divination by various means, including augury, the reading of omens from the flight and tones of birds, and haruspicy, examining the entrails of sacrificed animals.⁵⁰⁷ Their skill at this had already been noted with keen interest by Roman historians,⁵⁰⁸ who like other Romans were connoisseurs of these matters. Quite apart from divination by techniques such as those mentioned, there is also evidence for reading the hand,⁵⁰⁹ *zajr*, reading lines made in sand, and *ṭarq*, reading the configuration of pebbles scattered on the ground.⁵¹⁰ Visions and apparitions in dreams were not uncommon in Arab divination. These latter had some affinity to incubation, especially iatromancy,

⁵⁰¹ The term has semantic associations with heights. Traces of such an obscure association might be suggested by a Muḥammadan Tradition that inveighs against prayer on high ground (*nabī*): 'n-b-', LA.

⁵⁰² Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1.440.

⁵⁰³ For instance, Hammām b. Munabbih, *Ṣaḥīfa*, Arabic text, nos. 37, 39.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbbar*, 315 ff; Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣnām*, *passim*; Sa'īd, *al-Nasab*, 138.

⁵⁰⁵ SH, 1.15 ff., SII, § 51 f., and see Dostal, 'Mecca', 194 ff.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibn Qutayba, *Maysir*, 130 ff.; Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 309, 314. See Krone, *al-Lār*, 427. The material side is referred to in poetry: *al-Mafaddaliyyāt*, 50.12, 15 (al-Muraqqish al-Akbar, c. 550), 62.10 (al-Ḥārith b. Hilliza al-Yashkurī, c. 570).

⁵⁰⁷ SH, 1.81. See 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.786 ff. These, and drawing lots, were very ancient arts: Ezekiel 21.21.

⁵⁰⁸ Appianus, *Historia Romana*, fr. 19; Ioannes Laurentius Lydus, *De Mensibus*, 4.53 – I owe this material to Cristian Gaspar. See Hoyland, *Arabia*, 154 f.

⁵⁰⁹ Al-A'shā, *Dīwān*, 18.46. ⁵¹⁰ Ibn Qutayba, *Faḍl*, 142 f., 144.

when Meccans, including Muḥammad, invited visions by sleeping near the Ka'ba.⁵¹¹

But there were more formal procedures that took place at cultic locations, generally following sacrifice. The idols at Dhū'l-Khalāṣa and of Hubal in Mecca both worked by *istiḡsām* or *ḍarb*, lots using the divinatory technology of sticks or arrows (*azlām*, *qidāḥ*),⁵¹² a practice often conflated with the redistributive *maysir*.⁵¹³ Each was inscribed with a ready answer (three options by Dhū'l-Khalāṣa and seven by Hubal – differently identified in different sources).⁵¹⁴ Recourse to such drawing of lots, performed by a *yasār* or *yāsir* or by the *ḥarda*,⁵¹⁵ was made before circumcision, marriage, death, digging a well and much else, or when a dispute over paternity arose.⁵¹⁶ It was used in military reconnaissance, in estimating the strength of the enemy,⁵¹⁷ or, when appropriate, when dividing territory.⁵¹⁸ Finally, it was used when making decisions about war, the result of the lot on occasion ignored when it went counter to the wishes of those involved.⁵¹⁹ The failure

⁵¹¹ Al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 306; Littmann, *Safaitic Inscriptions*, nos. 325, 403; Fahd, *Divination*, 363 f.; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 153 f. One of the most famous such incidents of visions was that of 'Ātika b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib who, together with Juhaym b. al-Ṣalt, foretold the Meccan defeat by Muḥammad at Badr: *US*, no. 116, taken up in most later accounts (*SIH*, 2.182 ff., among others); *WAQ*, 122.

⁵¹² Al-Tabrīzī, *Sharḥ*, 169 n. 44. ⁵¹³ Jamil, 'Playing for time', 5, 52.

⁵¹⁴ *SIH*, 1.140; Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 332 ff.; *SII*, § 16; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 1.259 f.; TAB, 304; Fahd, *Divination*, 179 ff.; 'Istiḡsām', 'Dhū'l Khalāṣa' and 'Istikhāra', *El. Jacob (Beduinenleben*, 110 f.) had already noted the variety of possible games of chance and divination, which he likened to card games. Divination by lots according to various techniques appears to have been fairly widespread in Roman times, especially among rustics and the lower classes: for a geographically restricted treatment, including a treatment of divinatory techniques, see Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*, 23 ff. Divination by lots, drawn, as in Arabia, among a restricted number of ready answers, was already parodied by Aristophanes, and there is later, pagan and Christian Roman evidence for it from Anatolia, Thrace, Egypt and Cyprus. This involved techniques, including techniques of combination, rather more complex than those available in Arabia: Björk, 'Heidnische und christliche Orakel'. Overall, divination by means of sticks, including sticks bearing numbers referring to a fixed list of ready answers, seems to have been ubiquitous, and to form part of a broader category of mantic techniques that includes throwing dice and other divinatory instruments. Strickmann (*Chinese Poetry*, 3 f. and *passim*) describes very well the Chinese Ch'ien Tung, divination by means of sticks in temples before the image of a deity, and suggests similarities with Arab cleromancy and the more elaborate later Arab and Muslim techniques, in addition to similar Graeco-Roman, Tibetan, Indian, Turkic and Sogdian cleromantic practices, and considers in a preliminary the issue of influence and diffusion (at 110 f., 112 ff., 118 ff. and ch. 9, *passim*).

⁵¹⁵ Al-Tabrīzī, *Sharḥ*, 179 n. 73. The latter term seems more appropriate: the former was identified with *istiḡsām* gambling, where it designated a category of winners. See the lexical and other considerations of al-Biqā'ī, 'Naẓm al-Durar', 29, 31, and al-Zabīdī, 'Nashwat al-Irtiyāḥ', 49.

⁵¹⁶ TAB, 304. ⁵¹⁷ *WAQ*, 62. ⁵¹⁸ Cf. *AGH*, 11.95.

⁵¹⁹ Ibn Qutayba, *Maysir*, 39. *WAQ*, 33 f.; *AGH*, 9.70, relates that the poet Imru' al-Qays insulted Dhū'l-Khalāṣa when the idol decreed, by lot, that he should not go ahead and try to exact revenge from the murderers of his father.

of a ritual or magical act does not itself compromise belief in its efficacy, or undermine its prospects of repetition.⁵²⁰

The *kāhin* belonged to a class of freelance prophets. Evidence shows these to have been generally unaffiliated to a specific cult, although they were associated with them on occasion as they plied their trade, but not in a priestly capacity, nor in association with the tasks of *sadāna*.⁵²¹ This is illustrated by the legend of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s vow to sacrifice one of his sons: on appealing to a *kāhina* for an oracle, she awaited her familiar, and finally referred ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib to Hubal and his lots.⁵²² The *kāhin/kāhina* was an ecstatic seer, in communion with and receiving inspiration and foreknowledge from the *jinn*. There were other classes of diviners (*ḥāzī*, *‘arrāf*, *qā’if*, *‘ā’if*), labelled with terms designating particular techniques of divination, not all of them ecstatic.⁵²³ More broadly, *kuhhān* appear on occasion to have performed the role of arbitrators or of judges in poetical parries, delivering judgments in *rajaz*.⁵²⁴

Generally speaking, the divinatory inspiration from the *jinn* was received as the *kāhin/kāhina* fell into a trance (*takahhana*). The oracular pronouncement was habitually delivered in the form of *saj’*.⁵²⁵ This was a form of rhymed enunciation, neither fully poetry nor fully prose, with cadenced periods and an accentual metre, without prosodic measure to its short, successive syntagms of enunciation.⁵²⁶ In this particular rhythmic form of prose were expressed all manner of vatic and allusive oracular statements, frequently containing oaths by a variety of beings, such as mountains, trees, the heavens, constellations, and hours of the day and night, all of which had certain ritual and religious associations, and all of which were signs of

⁵²⁰ See especially the discussion of magical efficacy as a social act, in terms of both an illocutionary act and a socially recognised operational efficacy: Sørensen, ‘Efficacy’, and Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1.427.

⁵²¹ Thus, *contra* Fahd, *Divination*, 92 ff. ⁵²² *SII*, §§ 20 ff.

⁵²³ Fahd, *Divination*, 91 ff. ⁵²⁴ See Jones, ‘Language’, 35 f.

⁵²⁵ The word seems etymologically to have been derived from the cooing of pigeons, which is said in the lexica to be similar to the *‘azīf* of the *jinn*.

⁵²⁶ Fahd, *Divination*, 151 ff.; ‘Sadj’, *EI*, 8.732 ff. For the formal structure of *saj’*, see Wagner, *Grundzüge*, 43 ff., and the detailed discussion of Qur’anic *saj’* in Stewart, ‘*Saj’*’, *passim*, of which a treatment is given by the same author in shorter compass in ‘Rhymed prose’, *EQ*, 4.476 ff. *Saj’* has certain formal affinities with glossolalia, unintelligible ‘speaking in tongues’, attested in the Old and New Testaments, amongst contemporary Pentecostals, and much farther afield, with pulsating rhythms, elocutionary stresses and rhythmical phrasing. See Sawyer, *Sacred Languages*, 41 ff., Forbes, *Prophecy*, ch. 3 for an elaborate historical discussion, and Dautzenberg, ‘Glossolalie’, *RAC* xi.230 ff. Neurologically, however, it appears that glossolalia is not associated with the usual language functions (B. Carey, ‘A neuroscientific look at speaking in tongues’, *New York Times*, 7 September, 2006), which would distinguish it in this particular respect from *saj’* and kindred phenomena.

natural permanence.⁵²⁷ Such a standard form of the delivery of prophecy was this, that it was quite common in the earlier parts of the Qur'ān, coinciding with the prelude and initial announcements of Muḥammad's mission as prophet, as has long been realised, thereby documenting the pronouncements of the *kubhān*.⁵²⁸ Like other seers, Muḥammad had visions, heard voices and other uncanny sounds, experienced iatromantic visions, fell into convulsions and confusion, broke into cold perspiration, and covered his face.⁵²⁹ The Qur'ān calls him *al-muddaththir*, the Enshrouded One.⁵³⁰ Like the *kubhān*, he fell into ecstatic states, and pronounced what he had to say with appropriate diction.⁵³¹ So also did the Jew Ibn Ṣayyād,⁵³² an extremely obscure figure whose profile in the sources is in many ways similar to Muḥammad's, the two regarded by one scholar as 'reflexes' of one another.⁵³³

Yet such oracular pronouncements were not confined to the *kubhān*, who were associated with particular clans and often delivered appropriate prophecies during military campaigns.⁵³⁴ In addition, Arabic sources are replete with accounts of the *hamhama* or the *hātaf* emerging from cultic objects, perhaps delivered ventriloqually, presumably through the *sādin*.⁵³⁵ These voices were not dissimilar to the sounds of the *jinn* that have been encountered above, and indeed to the more general phenomenon of oracles,

⁵²⁷ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Munammaq*, 103 ff.; Jones, 'Language', 33 ff.

⁵²⁸ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 135; Muir, *Corān*, 43 ff.; f. Buhl, 'Koran', *Et*, 1.1066b – see Q, 74.32, 74.34, 84.8, 86.1, 89.1, 91.1, 95.1, 103.1. For a detailed formal analysis and typology, see Neuwirth, 'Horizont', and the sources there cited. See also Izutsu, *God and Man*, 182 ff.; Jones, 'Language', 36 f., and the reservations of Neuwirth in 'Rhetoric and the Qur'ān', *EQ*, 4.463. I should like to add here that Neuwirth's *Koran*, a consolidated synthesis of her numerous and most significant contributions to the field of Qur'ānic studies, a great many of which are quoted throughout, reached me only after this book had been written, and has been used only intermittently.

⁵²⁹ These are well-known expressions of prophecy, often attributed to epilepsy both by medieval polemicists and by many modern scholars, and are conveniently summarised in 'Wahy', *Et*. Already in 1883, Wellhausen ('Mohammedanism', 547 n. 1) had noted the suggestion of Sprenger that the key to understanding Muḥammad's prophecy, and by extension his religion, might be sought in a medical or psychiatric problem involving epilepsy, hysteria and catalepsy; Hirschfeld (*Researches*, 20) argued against this use of nineteenth-century pop psychology, including spiritualism and Swedenborgianism, in the interpretation of Muḥammad's prophecy. For the connections made in the nineteenth century between religious and political 'enthusiasm' and hysteria and epilepsy, see Toscano, *Fanaticism*, 19. It might be added that temporal lobe epilepsy is sometimes associated with unexpected mystical, religious, artistic or sexual feelings.

⁵³⁰ On this term, and the related *al-muzzammil*, in Muslim traditions, see Rubin, 'Shrouded messenger', 96 ff.

⁵³¹ See also van Ess, 'Muḥammad', 10, and the fine analysis of this diction by Neuwirth, 'Historische Muḥammad', 96 ff.

⁵³² Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 6.565 f. ⁵³³ Newby, *Jews*, 62 f.

⁵³⁴ For example, the prophecy of 'Awf b. Rabī'a of the B. Asad, around the middle of the sixth century, in Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shi'r*, 1.106 f.

⁵³⁵ Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣnām*, 11, 18; Fahd, *Divination*, 171 ff.

perhaps most famously the Pythian Oracle at Delphi which, like the *ṣanam*, was *entheos*, inhabited by the deity and, not unlike the verses of poets, possessed by the Muses.⁵³⁶ The general character of this phenomenon is again confirmed by at least one Christian Arabic source that spoke of Egyptian idols speaking, animated by the devil.⁵³⁷ It is hardly surprising, therefore, that such pronouncements in the form of *saj'*, issuing from idols as well as from unidentifiable locations and a variety of objects animate and inanimate, should have been assumed to have announced to the Arabs of the Hijāz the prophecy of Muḥammad.⁵³⁸

Little is known of magic practised or of magical spells concocted, often in association with actions of the *jinn*,⁵³⁹ by the *kuhhān* or by others, although one might, on the strength of various phenomena discussed, assert the very wide prevalence of magical practices and conceptions of the contagious type, irrespective of whether or not unseen powers were or were not explicitly conjured up as actors. In all cases, the continuum between the seen and the unseen, and between word and act, was assumed. The Qur'ān, where the term *siḥr*, magic, occurs fifty-seven times, and prophetic traditions as well, does indicate the existence of such actions, including actions received and practised by Muḥammad.⁵⁴⁰ The apotropaic invocation contained in a very early Qur'ānic *sūra* (113.4) is directed against 'spewers into knots'. These spewers, *al-naḥḥāthāt*, give forth an uncanny force,⁵⁴¹ and they spewed into knots, probably made of the wool of sheep or goats, as incantations were pronounced and spells were bound – it is to be expected that spells of this or other kinds would have entailed magical techniques for breaking them. Muḥammad performed thaumaturgic *naḥḥ*, accompanied by incantations, into his own hands, which he then spread around his body as he was ill.⁵⁴² This is much like the metaphorical *naḥḥ* received into Muḥammad's heart in the course of his inspiration, and that directed by him at persons he wished to heal, just as, like Jesus, he healed

⁵³⁶ Dodds, *Greeks*, 70 f., 80 ff. ⁵³⁷ Thilo, *Codex Apocryphus*, 1:x.

⁵³⁸ *SH*, 1.288 ff. ⁵³⁹ See 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.745 f.

⁵⁴⁰ Here as elsewhere, word-counts of Qur'ānic terms are based on *al-Mu'jam al-Iḥṣā'ī*. On the Qur'ān, Muḥammad and magic, see the valuable material in al-Bāqillānī, *al-Bayān*, §§ 92 ff., elaborated theologically and apologetically as it may be.

⁵⁴¹ See 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.743 ff., on this and other forms of magic and counter-magic, called *ta'akhhudh* (*AGH*, 11.147).

⁵⁴² *US*, no. 316; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 6.233 f., a tradition going back to 'Ā'isha, transmitted by 'Urwa. That Muḥammad did so thrice brings this practice in line with Arabian practice, as both oaths and curses tended to be repeated three or seven times in order for them to be effective, as suggested already: Pedersen, *Eid*, 5, 5 n. 3. The later Muslim view that Satan ensnares a sleeping individual by weaving three 'knots' of possession on his head (al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.148) would seem to reflect the action of a *jinni* countered by the thrice-repeated counter-action.

by the sympathetic transfer of his spittle to those in need of healing or simply as an act of blessing.⁵⁴³

It goes without saying that much the same verbal and gestural procedures of cursing were also used for healing and blessing.⁵⁴⁴ The ceremony of *taḥnīk*, used to bless new-born children as they were given their names, which involved a transfer of saliva whereby the one naming would chew a date, then swab it around the inside of the infant's mouth, was often practised by Muḥammad (and by Musaylima b. Ḥabīb), and was not confined to the Arabs.⁵⁴⁵ This ceremony, it might be added, may have been accompanied by the shaving of the infant's hair, the sacrifice of a sheep and the daubing of the baby's head with sacrificial blood.⁵⁴⁶ Finally, mention must be made of the evil eye, a very ancient and widespread belief,⁵⁴⁷ and of the extramission of the malevolent will it involves, analogous to the extramission of the cursing voice, of the *mubāhala* and the *mulā'ana*, all of a type with a contagion-magical world. It may have been the case that specific tattoos were used as a permanent means of warding off the evil eye; one statement attributed to Muḥammad conjoins an affirmation of the evil eye with a discouragement of tattooing.⁵⁴⁸

The End of Days

There is no evidence of a theology or of a formal, constant and persistent taxonomy of the divine, hierarchical or otherwise. The lack of specialised as distinct from specific deities – with the possible exception of Hubal, although this might be denied by the fact that he is reported to have received a special *talbiya*, which would render his cleromantic capacity, like that of Dhū'l-Khalāṣa, one functional feature added to others – would, as suggested, deny the ascription of mythological attributes like that of 'god of clouds' for Quzaḥ, for instance,⁵⁴⁹ not to speak of sun gods, moon gods, or high and low gods.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴³ *SH*, 1.279; 2.109; 184; 3.395 f., 413 f.; 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.743 f.; Caetani and Gabrieli, *Onomasticon*, 1.§§ 23 ff.; 'n-f-th' *LA*; *SH*, 1.279; 2.109; 3.395 f., 413 ff.; Mark, 8.22–6.

⁵⁴⁴ Already noted by Jacob, *Beduinenleben*, 157, speaking also of exorcism.

⁵⁴⁵ See the discussion of Morgenstern, *Rites*, 34 f.

⁵⁴⁶ Both hair shaved and the sacrificial victim were called '*aqīqa*'. See "–q-q", *LA*; Wellhausen, *Reste*, 174; Chelhod, *Sacrifice*, 137 ff.; Morgenstern, *Rites*, 36 ff., and cf. *ibid.*, 83.

⁵⁴⁷ Al-Aḥmad (*Mujtama'*, 204) cites Safaitic evidence of the evil eye, on which see in general 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.751 ff.

⁵⁴⁸ Hammām b. Munabbih, *Ṣaḥīfa*, no. 129. ⁵⁴⁹ Osiander, 'Studien', 503.

⁵⁵⁰ Ryckmans ('Quelques divinités', 460 f.) holds that South Arabian epithets might be so interpreted as to reveal elaborate myths.

But no people, no society, can ever be bereft of myth,⁵⁵¹ although one needs to be wary of the mentalist conception of myth as an 'explanation' of natural and other phenomena, answering questions motivated by cognitive curiosity. Myths of the Arabs seem to have been aetiological, as suggested. They seem to have involved less gods than heroes. Works by Wāḥb b. Munabbih and 'Ubayd b. Sharyah reflect this fully: the myth of Luqmān b. 'Ād already mentioned, associated with heights, eagles and disembodied commanding voices, hardly at all studied but considered 'a supreme collage' and the greatest figure of Arabian myth,⁵⁵² or indeed the myth of Hūd, however Islamised its extant redaction,⁵⁵³ or of anti-heroes, such as Thamūd. Many scholars have noted this, and noted the mythemetic content of certain elements in the *ayyām* traditions, and in accounts of eponymous ancestors.⁵⁵⁴ The myth about the fornicating Isāf and Nā'ila turned to stone is also cited in this respect,⁵⁵⁵ and in one case as an instance of hero worship;⁵⁵⁶ Yemenite material offers one instance of an arguably divinised king around the BC/AD turn.⁵⁵⁷ There may well have been myths involving stars, although, in light of the discussion above, this needs to be approached with caution.⁵⁵⁸ There is clearly much room for research in this domain of mythography and mythological analysis.⁵⁵⁹

Death does not seem to have associated beliefs or myths, although it is a theme that often bears close connections with religion and religious representations. Little is known about the views of death held by late antique Arabs; such indications as we do have point to some form of belief in spirits. Early Arab evidence from the word *nfs* (*nafs* in Arabic)

⁵⁵¹ Goldziher, *Mythos*, x.

⁵⁵² Norris, 'Fables and legends', 378 ff., who indicates (*passim*) other stories and story cycles and difficulties encountered in studying them.

⁵⁵³ Wāḥb b. Munabbih, *al-Tījān*, 44.

⁵⁵⁴ Goldziher, *Mythos*, xxvii; Chelhod, 'Mythe', 72, who also speaks (at 72, 82, 83 f.) of heroes civilising humanity and subduing Chaos, most pertinently in the case of Muḥammad. What might be worth looking into is whether this myth of Muḥammad was fashioned by his own self-perception, and what sorts of parallels may have existed for it.

⁵⁵⁵ Goldziher, *Mythos*, 209 f. (but nevertheless, Goldziher did maintain in letters to Nöldeke that the Arabs had no myth, no historical sense and little interest in metaphysics: Simon, *Goldziher*, nos. 18, 46); see this and other myths in 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.68 ff.

⁵⁵⁶ Krehl, *Religion*, 54 ff., to which the author adds Wadd and Suwā', on which see also 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.70.

⁵⁵⁷ Robin, 'Matériaux', 95 ff. To infer from this a general Arabian cult of the dead seems to be without justification. Further on this, with regard to much earlier periods in Yemen: Arbach, 'Dieux anthropomorphiques'.

⁵⁵⁸ Goldziher, *Mythos*, xxviii; Chelhod, 'Mythe', 73; 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.817 f.; al-Nu'aymī, *al-Uṣṭūra*, 151 ff.

⁵⁵⁹ The only systematic attempt so far has been Stetkevych, *Golden Bough*. Arabic poetry contains plentiful material: al-Nu'aymī, *al-Uṣṭūra*, *passim*.

suggest the possibility of a belief in the individual spirit of the dead person. The term is attested from the Hellenistic period, and expressed in the erection of stelae called *nefesh* throughout Nabataean territory, in Palmyra, Ituraea and the Edessene. These were occasionally located in sanctuaries which also served to guarantee asylum,⁵⁶⁰ as some tombs did in polytheistic times, with a *qubba* denoting *jiwār* or simply a cairn, and continued to be into early Muslim times. The famous Namāra funerary inscription for Imru' al-Qays the king states that the stele is the dead chief's *nafs* (*ty nfs* = **tī nafs*).⁵⁶¹ The meaning of the term is not unambiguous. In Arabic, it designate generally a self, a person; whether it also designated 'spirit' in its wider connotations remains unclear, and is improbable. It did designate the cenotaph itself,⁵⁶² not the body or spirit that may have dwelt in a grave. One Nabataean inscription at Petra stated that the cenotaph itself was the *nfs* of one Petraios, son of Threpros, who died in Gerasa and lay there buried.⁵⁶³ It was at once person and memorial.

However matters stood, the difficulty of making any overall observations without a critical mass of material specific to time and place must be recognised. At their most manifest, funerary stelae⁵⁶⁴ were devices of memorialisation for the dead individual and for his people. The names inscribed on funerary stelae at Namāra and that of Mu'āwiyat b. Rabī'at, among others, at Qaryat al-Fāw,⁵⁶⁵ were meant to be read out: the name lent voice to the deceased,⁵⁶⁶ and in the process served to perpetuate renown, legacy, immortality born of procreation (*sum'a*, *sīt*, as well as *dhurriyya*), as in the archaic Greek *onomathesis* where the name is conjoined with *klēos* in the manner discussed above.⁵⁶⁷

Throughout, there is no evidence whatsoever that there was a 'cult of the dead'. What may be true is that there existed a memorialisation of dead souls, though it is uncertain that this had a religious association. For the Ḥarra region of the Ṣafā in southern Syria, it has been argued from epigraphic evidence that the memorialisation of the dead involved ceremonial lamentation (which is almost universally attested) and communal

⁵⁶⁰ Gawlikowski, 'Sacred space', 302. ⁵⁶¹ RCEA, no. 1.

⁵⁶² Caskel, 'Inscription', 375; Macdonald, 'Burial', 288, 290, based on Safaitic material.

⁵⁶³ Gatier, 'Présence', quoting J. Starcky, 'Nouvelle épitaphe nabatéenne donnant le nom sémitique de Pétra', *Revue Biblique*, 72 (1965), 95–7.

⁵⁶⁴ Thus for Safaitic stelae: Macdonald, 'Burial', 290. There were anthropomorphic funerary stelae on the road from Jordan to central north Arabia from the end of the fourth millennium BC, mapped in *Routes d'Arabie*, 167, with figs. 27–9.

⁵⁶⁵ Al-Anṣārī, *Qaryat al-Fāw*, 20. See also Beeston, 'Nemara and Faw', 1.

⁵⁶⁶ Macdonald, 'Burial', 290 n. 77bis. ⁵⁶⁷ Svenbro, *Phrasikleia*, 76 ff.

drinking, not at the grave-side, but at the memorial location.⁵⁶⁸ Whether this ritual practice was widespread remains an open question.⁵⁶⁹ Without a stele, communion with the dead person, his perpetuation in a way, was assured by visiting the grave under a simple cairn on special occasions; we have accounts of revellers repairing to the grave of a dead friend to drink there, and to pour wine upon it.⁵⁷⁰ We also have information on funerary feasts or wakes called *waḍīma*, and much on lamentation,⁵⁷¹ which serves ritually to separate the dead from the living.

Yet progeny celebrated through memorialising the dead implies persistence only by social extension, and, in terms of family relations, perhaps by synecdoche as well. Ultimately, memorialisation served as the ritual affirmation and perpetuation of blood ties,⁵⁷² and of other ties as well. Information about the spirits of a person indicates more the existence of beliefs in some connection between the dead person and his or her remains, than the nature of such beliefs.⁵⁷³ There are all manner of possible conceptions of the relation between soul and body, including the notion of a double,⁵⁷⁴ which was eminently available to the Arabs. There is evidence from elegiac poetry, embodied in the expression *lā tab'ud*, of some form of virtual communion with the dead.⁵⁷⁵ Funerary rites and other evidence, especially poetic evidence, indicate that only in the case of death in a state of dissatisfaction, following murder with blood unrequited, was much made of the soul as a double, wherever this vital spirit, *rūḥ*, might have resided in the body while alive.⁵⁷⁶ To suppose that spirits hovered around the grave and above it, or that they were potentially evil spirits that required appeasement,⁵⁷⁷ seems to have little justification.

⁵⁶⁸ See Jacob, *Beduinenleben*, 140, 142; Abdessselem, *Thème de la Mort*, 107 ff. On lamentation, see Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 116 ff. There are indications that professional wailers often doubled up as singers: for instance, al-Iṣbahānī, *al-Qiyān*, 71.

⁵⁶⁹ Grimme, *Texte*, 150 ff., 171. It goes without saying that not all ritual practices have a religious character: ritual is a wide-embracing category of formalised action which has religious activity at one extremity and social etiquette at the other. See Gluckman, *Ritual*, 20 ff.

⁵⁷⁰ AGH, 9.93 f. (the grave of the poet al-A'shā, a famous imbibor and reveller), 12.91 f. (the grave of the Christian poet Abū Zubayd al-Ṭā'ī).

⁵⁷¹ On which Abdessselem, *Thème de la Mort*, 98 ff. ⁵⁷² Abdessselem, *Thème de la Mort*, 105.

⁵⁷³ Al-Mas'ūdī (*Murūj*, §§ 1190 ff.) provides a tally of what Arabic traditions thought pagan Arabs believed. See Chelhod, *Structures*, 106 ff.

⁵⁷⁴ 'Seele', *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*.

⁵⁷⁵ Stetkevych, *Mute Immortals*, 169 ff.

⁵⁷⁶ Abdessselem, *Thème de la Mort*, 79 f., 82, 93 – the author (at 77) maintains that this belief was probably held across the board, but see the specification at 82. Cf. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Mahomet*, 457.

⁵⁷⁷ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 185; Morgenstern, *Rites*, 136 f., 160. Jacob (*Beduinenleben*, 143) conjectures that the body in the grave gets thirsty, hence libations of wine at the grave-side.

Like many other peoples,⁵⁷⁸ the Arabs seem to have associated the spirits of the dead with birds, most particularly with the owl (*al-hāma*) which, if the dead person be murdered, would perch on his grave and call for vengeance, demanding that it be given to drink,⁵⁷⁹ clearly a clamour for blood, an association which may have been metaphorical, but may also have involved beliefs that escape us entirely.⁵⁸⁰ The *hāma* was associated with the *ṣadā* (otherwise designating an echo), this word very likely indicating its call for drink.⁵⁸¹ Thus the unquiet spirit comes to join the 'sinister concert' of the desert,⁵⁸² together with the wind, the '*azīf* of the *jinn*, the call of the owl, the echo, the howling of the wolf, the mirage, all so hauntingly described in Arabic poetry, to evoke a whole world of the animate unseen lying at the heart of pagan Arab religion. Like the *jinn*, *al-hāma*, existing in the person as his double even before death and acting as a synecdoche for him thereafter (*al-hāma* means, lexically, 'forehead'), could act as an informant of distant things.⁵⁸³ The association with inspiration is evident. In all, what we have is not so much a specific belief in spirits as much as part of a bundle of related beliefs in doubles, transmogrification and translocation which we have encountered, bound together by sympathies and synecdoche; to this extent death was conceived in a manner congruent with pagan Arab conceptions of religion.

The belief in the *al-hāma* is one which Muḥammad repudiated, although the Qur'ān (17.13) does state that God has attached to each man a bird around the neck, which exegetes with the exception of al-Rāzī (d. 1210) have tended, unsurprisingly, to interpret metaphorically rather than relate it more closely to the beliefs of polytheistic Arabs.⁵⁸⁴ It may well be that this Qur'ānic assertion, and what other sources provide, echoes an association of pagan deities, and the locations sacred to them, with birds. Umayya b. Abī al-Salt derisively and perhaps parodically describes darkish birds perched around idols – *abābīl^{un} ribbaḍ^{un}* – helping with the sacrificial slaughter of a tom-cat, using the same word for bird as that used in the

⁵⁷⁸ Jones, *On the Nightmare*, 61 f., 64.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibn Sa'īd, *Nashwa*, 788; al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, 2.237; al-Damīrī, *al-Hayawān*, 4.446 f.; Homerin, 'Echoes', 168 f.; 'Ajīna, *Asāṭīr*, 1.334 ff. This *hāma* may well be related to the Persian *huma*, a benign mythological bird which nevertheless feeds on carrion.

⁵⁸⁰ This theme was to have very broad uses and symbolic play in Arabic poetry: Stetkevych, *Zephyrs*, 67 ff., and ch. 2, *passim*.

⁵⁸¹ Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishtiqāq*, 233 f.; Abdesslem, *Thème de la Mort*, 79 f., 80 n. 108.

⁵⁸² Abdesslem, *Thème de la Mort*, 80.

⁵⁸³ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, § 1193, quoting a poem by Umayya b. Abī al-Salt.

⁵⁸⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, *ad loc.* One might recall here the Viragna of the Parthians, the bird of Ashi, goddess of fortune, who carries away the *xwarnā* of the king when he is no longer victorious or otherwise favoured. Some form of mythemic connection with the Valkyres could well be indicated.

famous Qur'ānic passage describing the agents of divine help received by Meccans.⁵⁸⁵ Muslim traditions report that angels visited Muḥammad in the shape of cranes,⁵⁸⁶ birds being not uncommonly associated with angels and demons.

Moreover, the practice of tethering a man's camel to his grave with its head covered, turned around and tied to its back (*ḥabīs al-balāya*), and left to die, is widely reported. It is also reported that if such a camel were to pull itself free of its tether, it would be considered free to roam, graze and drink at will.⁵⁸⁷ There is zooarchaeological evidence of the sacrificial slaughter or the burying alive of camels near the graves of their owners.⁵⁸⁸ This is difficult to interpret, except in terms of sacrifice for the dead or in their memory. Such sacrifices, of a sanguine nature, did take place, and pouring wine over a grave might be considered a libation.⁵⁸⁹ The differences may well have been regional, or have changed with time. Whatever the interpretation, this was not, as later Muslim traditions had it, the provision of a mount for the Day of Resurrection.⁵⁹⁰ There is no evidence whatsoever that the pagan Arabs believed in an afterlife, or in the resurrection of bodies,⁵⁹¹ although some Arabs, above all Muḥammad, were vaguely aware of such beliefs, and intensified their awareness as they went along to construct the new cultic association that was to become the Paleo-Muslims.

Arabian monolatry and ambient monotheism

Much is often claimed for connections between the rise of Islam and monotheistic religions of which the Qur'ān claims to be the definitive consummation. Most of the scholarship sustaining this view is subtended by the implicit assumption that monotheism has a continuous, linear and almost natural history. This requires closer scrutiny, with a turn that might allow us to consider with some precision the way in which, and the extent to which, monotheistic religions surrounding the societies of late antique Arabs might or might not be considered to have acted as a constitutive element in the initial conditions upon which the emergence of Allāh and of Paleo-Islam was premised.

⁵⁸⁵ Umayya b. Abī al-Salt, *Dīwān*, 32.3.

⁵⁸⁶ *SII*, § 34. For Qur'ānic notions of the spirit and the soul, see 'Soul', *EQ*.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibn Sa'īd, *Nashwa*, 2.788; Pellat, 'Al-Ġāḥiz', 94.

⁵⁸⁸ Bin Šarāy, *al-Ibil*, 82 ff., 129 ff.; on this theme in ancient Arabic poetry, *ibid.*, 122 ff. and al-Nu'aymī, *al-Uṣṭūra*, 186 ff.

⁵⁸⁹ Abdesselem, *Thème de la Mort*, 103 f. ⁵⁹⁰ See, for instance, Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 52.

⁵⁹¹ Abdesselem, *Thème de la Mort*, 77, 105, 108.

We have seen that the religious and devotional koine of late antique Arabs was structured, not by a set of religious beliefs comprising a theology and a taxonomy of the divine, but rather by the undertow of an infrastructure of cult, composed of times, places and rites which formed the scatter of divine names into a system. But these late antique Arabs were not necessarily resistant or immune to deities and the representation of deities coming from abroad, to be integrated into the structures of local, indwelling cults. This koine, for all its stubborn persistence, was not closed to adjunction.

We have also seen that the heteroclyte composition and provenance of the deities worshipped – and this was already underlined by the historian al-Ya‘qūbī⁵⁹² – had been characterised by a flux. We have witnessed the mutual translatability of deities characteristic of polytheism, despite the fact that specific collectivities were given to prefer one tutelary deity over another, more because sacred territories needed to be socially and territorially demarcated than because the characters and powers ascribed to deities were distinctive. These deities were mostly, *grosso modo*, all-purpose and, most likely, generic deities with different names sharing many attributes, chthonian or otherwise, albeit subject to the ebb and flow of social composition and political control.

Œcumenical echoes

Late antique Arabs were subject to the trickling down of religious goods coming from territories to the north, north-east and south, in closer touch with metropolitan centres and religions. The idol of Hubal was clearly a fossil from elsewhere, given local character in Mecca. His generic character is expressed in the category-name, *ṣanam*, like *wathan*, being of foreign origin: *ṣanam* from Aramaic, *wathan* from Epigraphic South Arabian.⁵⁹³ The Black Stone at Mecca and the *maqām* were local animate cult objects, with the sacrality of a betyl, later fossilised into a narrative tradition under Islam.⁵⁹⁴ Qur’ānic references to contemporary deities themselves appear as fossils, as their worship is therein ascribed to ancient times (Q, 71.21–3),

⁵⁹² Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 1.254.

⁵⁹³ Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 199, 286; Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 474–5 n. 46. For the terms, see Robin, ‘Matériaux’, 59 f.

⁵⁹⁴ See Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 51. It is interesting to note that, along with Christian polemics, medieval Jewish anti-Muslim polemics – by Judah Halevi and Petrus Alfonsi, among others – identified this point as the prime indicator for the view that Islam was a form of paganism: Septimus, ‘Petrus Alfonsi’, 519 f. See Tolan, *Saracens*, ch. 5 and *passim*. Maimonides, though denying that the Muslims were idolators, did indicate that a number of Muslim rites, including stoning the devil, had polytheistic roots: Ibn Maimon, *Responsa*, 2.725 ff. = pt 6, 369, no. 448.

although they appear to have been worshipped in Muḥammad's neighbouring region of Najrān (Nasr), and in the Tihāma of Najrān (Yā'ūq and Yaghūth) and of Medina (Suwā'). Many temporalities were at work. We have seen, finally, that the overall configuration, geographical as well as theological, had a structural coherence, deriving from the elementary structures of polytheism at the point of application. For all of Wellhausen's 'chaff of divine names', what we seem to have are diffuse, polyonymous noumena. In all cases, the *Sondergötter* operated as *Augenblicksgötter* at the time and place of each application.

There was indeed a good measure of divine trans-locality, underlined by shifts in the geography of the sacred. We saw that this was largely dependent on the predominance of social groups native to a particular region, exercising shifting control over restricted territories in a manner that changed convulsively, which might be regarded as conjunctural responses in microcosm to the capillary disturbances caused by the vagaries of relations between Byzantines, Sasanians, Yemenites and Aksumites. But abiding transitions from the trans-local to the trans-regional required a major political and social upheaval, which was later to be brought about by Paleo-Islam, transitions which had already been in place outside the boundaries of inner Arabia – in Syria, in southern Iraq to some extent, and in Yemen to a certain extent too, all territories which around c. 500 had been incorporated, in varying measures, into systems with œcumenical vocations that went in tandem with universalising and exclusivist religions.

Within the ambit of imperial religions, and pre-dating them, there existed nevertheless a number of trans-regional centres of cult which drew pilgrims from far and wide. We have already encountered the ancient temple at Manbij (Hierapolis), in a location not identified with any particular centre of political control. We have also encountered al-Ruṣāfa/Sergiopolis, under Jafnid control, as well as others, including Mecca. There is evidence of a variety of trans-local cultic centres in Arabia, and one would assume that sacred seasons, allied to the movements indicated above and connected to the timing of markets, were observed at such locations. It is not known if al-Rawwāfa functioned as such,⁵⁹⁵ but there is archaeological evidence that Tall al-Rāhib in northern Jordan functioned thus for a number of Safaitic tribes.⁵⁹⁶

Farther afield, according to a report by an envoy of Justinian, Saracens were said to have gathered at a sacred location twice a year, once in the

⁵⁹⁵ Sartre (*Etudes*, 130 f.) regards al-Rawwāfa and the temple of Allāt at Wādī Ramm as sanctuaries that prefigured other trans-local sites, such as the shrine of St Sergius in al-Ruṣāfa.

⁵⁹⁶ Fritz Thyssen Stiftung, *Jahresbericht 2008/2009*, Cologne, 2009, 125.

middle of spring when the sun passes through the sign of Aries, and another after the summer solstice.⁵⁹⁷ This report is likely to have reflected a common practice, whereby a pattern of interaction between microlocalities was structured,⁵⁹⁸ in space and in time, not unlike trans-local sites mentioned above. Mention might be made of Mamre, near al-Khalil in Palestine, with a fair where, according to Sozomen,⁵⁹⁹ Saracens and others gathered, pagans worshipping angels while Jews and Christians offered devotions to Abraham, with sacrifices, processions, votive offerings, altars.⁶⁰⁰ These places acted, it has been suggested, as centres for long-term ritual accumulation, and hence of trans-regional sanctity, hallowed territory generally recognised, according to socio-geographical and political mechanisms.

So also did two other centres, energised by imperial election and the stable sacred geography resulting from it, namely, Mount Sinai and Jerusalem. The Temple Mount in Jerusalem was later to become a much hallowed location for Paleo-Muslims, with the construction of the Dome of the Rock, yet another rock bearing a footprint, and belonged to the relatively rare category of shrines that seemed more important for what and where they were than for what happened in them.⁶⁰¹

Jerusalem is not mentioned in the Qur'ān, the Temple Mount possibly but improbably depending on how one interprets Q, 17.1–8. Neither do the other trans-local Christian sanctuaries to the north of the Peninsula, which were later to be reclaimed by Muslims in Biblical terms, seem to have been known.⁶⁰² The one exception is Mount Sinai.⁶⁰³

⁵⁹⁷ Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 28.

⁵⁹⁸ As in Roman Anatolia, for instance: Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, 455.

⁵⁹⁹ Sozomenos, *Historia*, 2.4.

⁶⁰⁰ These rites persisted between the third and the fifth centuries, a basilica constructed and certain forms of Roman Christian control were exercised, not always successfully: Kofsky, 'Mamre', 24 ff. and cf. Cook, *Muhammad*, 81.

⁶⁰¹ Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 106. ⁶⁰² These are listed and discussed in Busse, 'Islam', 137 ff.

⁶⁰³ Sycz (*Eigennamen*, 56 f.) notes that the Qur'ānic references to *Sinīn*, taken as references to Mount Sinai, do not suit the location. Cook (*Muhammad*, 69 f.) points to the curious paradox that the Qur'ān associates this location with olives – in fact, it mentions *Sinīn* together with figs and olives in an oath. Oaths often conjoined objects to be sworn by in a manner recalling Borges' library. There are accounts of Muḥammad having visited this holy mountain. Such reports may well reflect tales concocted by the monks of St Catherine's, claiming that Muḥammad had renewed the covenant of protection and privileges they had received earlier from Justinian; they even claimed to have a document to this effect signed by 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib: Busse, 'Jerusalem', 17, 31 ff., 14 n. 72; Maiberger, *Untersuchungen*, 112 f.; Hobbs, *Mount Sinai*, 158 ff.; Skrobucha, *Sinai*, 56 ff.; 'Sinai', *EQ*. Ghabban ('Inscription', 214, 214 n. 13) maintains reasonably that the document, supposedly bearing the date AH 8, cannot be authentic, if only on account of the fact that the Hijra calendar came into use officially only later, c. AH 16–17. Eight centuries ago, Ibn Taymiyya had judged this document, which he alluded to but did not mention by name, supposedly written in the hand of 'Alī, to be apocryphal (*al-Muntakhab*, 448). It was reaffirmed by successive Ottoman sultans

The connection between the Ḥijāz and Sinai goes a very long way back. There is a considerable amount of confusion (and of scholarship) about the location of Mount Sinai, whether this be what is today known as Jabal Mūsā above St Catherine's monastery, or Jabal 'Udayd between 'Aqaba and Gaza, on the Sinaitic fringes of the land traditionally called Midian. Both have numerous archaeological remains indicating very ancient cultic locations, and inscriptions that indicate deliberate pilgrimage rather than the graffiti of wayfarers. There is indication of a possible route for sea passage between the Ḥijāz and these areas, and epigraphic evidence of Ḥijāzi names in Sinai.⁶⁰⁴ And although there is very little by way of inscriptions in this area after c. AD 300,⁶⁰⁵ there is evidence from late antique papyri of pagan cult practices persisting, and of the use of Arabs as guides to pilgrims travelling to Mount Sinai.⁶⁰⁶ The cut-off date of c. 300 corresponds roughly to the termination of the seemingly stable regime of Thamūdīc inscriptions, the rise of the Sasanians and of al-Ḥīra, and the adoption by the inhabitants of the desert of prestige scripts, just before Arabic was to appear itself as a distinctive script.

What will have been filtered down to our pagan reservation was the sense of a distant sanctuary.⁶⁰⁷ Biblical associations came with monotheistic confessions, but associations with Arab prophets were nevertheless made. Mount Sinai held and still holds the footprint of the Prophet Ṣāliḥ,⁶⁰⁸ a prophet associated in the Qur'ān with Thamūd (Q, 11.64 ff.). This may be a geographical translation following Islam, but then it may not, and the matter is not, in the present state of knowledge, amenable to historical reconstruction.⁶⁰⁹ What is undeniable is that the Arabs did have a historical lore of ancient Arab peoples, as we have seen, and they received from al-Ḥīra

from Selim I to Abdülhamid II – the document now preserved in Istanbul bears the apparently authenticating impression of Muḥammad's hand. This story is similar to the redactions of the legend of Sergius-Bahīra, which located Muḥammad's encounter with this monk in a variety of monasteries, thereby enhancing their standing and, perhaps, their privileges: Roggema, *Legend of Sergius*, 48. At 40–46 and 49–52, the author unpicks the great diversity of detail in various redactions of this legend, and its stable formulaic elements, and discusses very well the manner in which Muslim accounts of Muḥammad's encounters with a monk were redacted as Christian apologetic counter-history (at 34, 54 f.).

⁶⁰⁴ Maiberger, *Untersuchungen*, 31 ff., 82 ff.; Moritz, *Sinaiakult*, 8 ff., 31 f.; 'Sinai', *Catholic Encyclopedia*. For the relocation of the mountain at which Moses met his Lord, with an archaeological and topographic reconstruction of an alternative Israelite itinerary in the Wilderness, see Anati, *Mountain of God*, esp. chs. 4 and 6. Bottéro (*Mésopotamie*, 53, 59 f.) suggests a more plausible location on the eastern side of the Gulf of 'Aqaba, and cites a volcanic eruption as a possible explanation for accounts of a mountain on fire.

⁶⁰⁵ Moritz, *Sinaiakult*, 32 f. ⁶⁰⁶ Kraemer, *Excavations*, 253 f.; Mayerson, 'Saracen', 284, 285 n. 4.

⁶⁰⁷ For uncertainties of reference, based on traditional material, see Bin Ṣarāy and al-Shāmīsī, *al-Mu'jam*, 151 ff., 232 ff., 305 ff.

⁶⁰⁸ Skrobucha, *Sinai*, 55 f. ⁶⁰⁹ For the scholarship, inconclusive as it is, see 'Ṣāliḥ', *EI*.

some Persian lore as well.⁶¹⁰ As a consequence, the existence of a legendary lore of pre-Muḥammadan Arabian prophecy, no matter how unstructured, cannot be excluded. Not the least of this lore is what the Qur'ān refers to as *asāṭīr al-awwālīn*, commonly understood and translated as 'myths of the ancients', but which would need, as in Sabaic *štr*, to refer to written material bearing this lore.⁶¹¹

It goes without saying that, in its Muslim form, this lore crafted a monotheistic vocation for these Arab prophets, relegated to an indefinite and undefinable past, and provided them with Abrahamic genealogies and moods. It might also be maintained that the provision of local Arabian genealogies for Muḥammadan prophecy, patterned along the narrative of prophecy unrequited and followed by calamity for those peoples who rejected their prophets, was correlated with the severance of any extensions in contemporary space for Muḥammad the prophet: in his own time, Muḥammad was construed as entirely unique, and all other prophets contemporary with him as impostors and anti-prophets.

In fact, we do have information on the presence of a number of prophets contemporary with Muḥammad and immediately preceding him. One only was reportedly recognised as such by Muḥammad himself. This was Khālid b. Sinān of the 'Abs, who dwelt in north-central Arabia and seems to have gained a good measure of regional prominence around the middle of the sixth century. Muslim traditions have it that he was the first among the descendants of Ishmael to be blessed with prophecy, but this was generally disparaged in Muslim traditions because he belonged to a nomadic rather than a sedentary people, the assumption here being that God would not confide prophecy to a nomad.⁶¹²

There is much material of ethnographic interest about Khālid b. Sinān, involving an indomitable, preternatural fire he managed to extinguish, possibly with reference to a lava flow. There are mentions of *al-'anqā'*, usually translated as 'phoenix', who preyed upon young children and disappeared as the result of Khālid's supplication to God,⁶¹³ and henceforth continued to exist 'only in pictures' woven on rugs – a clear reference to the Persian *simurgh* (the word *angha* is sometimes also used), a peacock with the head

⁶¹⁰ MbS, 4.622 f. Indeed, the 'parchments of the Persians' (*mabāriq al-Furs*) was a fairly standard topos in ancient Arabic poetry conveying the sense of evanescence and passage. See for instance, *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, 25.1 (al-Hārith b. Ḥilliza al-Yashkuri, d. c. 570), and 'h-r-q', *LA*.

⁶¹¹ Q, 6.25, 8.31, 16.24, 23.83, 25.5 (which explicitly refers to writing), 27.68, 46.17, 68.15, 83.13, and 's-t-r', *LA*. See the detailed study, based on lexical and exegetical material, of al-Nu'aymī, *al-Uṣṭūra*, 24 ff.

⁶¹² Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Ḥayawān*, 4.478.

⁶¹³ He was only one of three persons associated with this animal: 'Ajīna, *Asāṭīr*, 1.336 ff.

of a man or of a dog which is a common motif in Persian art, as al-Jāhiz noted.⁶¹⁴ In addition, impressions of a generalised animism, of the sacred character of rocks, of disembodied voices, and of the magical awe behind inscriptions, are very strongly conveyed by sayings attributed to Khālīd, some in *sajʿ*.⁶¹⁵

What is of particular salience is that Muḥammad is reported to have told Khālīd's daughter that her father was a prophet 'lost to his people', and that this daughter, upon hearing Muḥammad recite a Qur'ānic verse affirming divine unicity, *sūrat al-ikhlāṣ*, often used in prayer (Q, 112.1–4), declared she had heard her father pronounce these very words before.⁶¹⁶ Whether what is attributed to Khālīd betokened monotheism is a moot point, notwithstanding the attribution to him of mentioning the Highest God, *al-Ilāh al-A'lā*.⁶¹⁷ The likelihood is that this miracle-maker may have been an advocate of some kind of supra-celestialist monolatry. Recognition by Muḥammad may also have involved a political move that eventually resulted in the incorporation of 'Abs, disarranged after the war of al-Basūs, into the Paleo-Muslim polity.⁶¹⁸

More important was Masaylima b. Ḥabīb.⁶¹⁹ He appears briefly to have commanded the important region of al-Yamāma,⁶²⁰ and his prophecy appears to have been declared in some competition with Muḥammad.⁶²¹ Little will be said of him here except to indicate that his beliefs are hard to reconstruct and interpret,⁶²² and to mention that he declared al-Raḥmān to be his god.

⁶¹⁴ 'Harra', *El*; Ibn Saʿīd, *Nashwa*, 2.544; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Isāba*, no. 2355; al-Jāhiz, *al-Ḥayawān*, 7.120 ff. On this fire, Nār al-Ḥarratayn, and the 'anqā': al-Jāhiz, *al-Ḥayawān*, 4.476 f.; al-Thaʿālibī, *Thimār*, no. 943; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Isāba*, no. 2355.

⁶¹⁵ Saʿīd, *Anbiyāʾ*, 99, 101 ff.

⁶¹⁶ Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Isāba*, no. 2355; al-Thaʿālibī, *Thimār*, 1.574; al-Jāhiz, *al-Ḥayawān*, 4.476 f.

⁶¹⁷ Saʿīd, *Anbiyāʾ*, 92 f. ⁶¹⁸ Saʿīd, *Anbiyāʾ*, 67 ff., 79, 99.

⁶¹⁹ See in general 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.84 ff. On various versions of his name, Kister, 'Struggle', 2 f., and see the names and genealogies recorded by Makin, *Representing the Enemy*, 108 ff. Watt (*Muhammad at Medina*, 134) suggested that Musaylima should be taken as the actual name rather than a term of disparagement, as diminutive nominal forms were not uncommon – most famously, Umayya. To date, Makin's study is by far the fullest, but it reached me after this book had been written.

⁶²⁰ On the region see, provisionally, Barthold, 'Musaylima', 488 f., and al-Ḥallāq, *Maslama*, 27 ff.

⁶²¹ Wellhausen (*Skizzen*, 19) wrote: 'Schade, dass wir nicht genauer über Sagah und Musailima unterrichtet sind. Wir würden dann vielleicht die selben Kräfte in einer anderen Gegend wirken sehen, die in Mekka und Medina den Islam erzeugt haben'. Makin (*Representing the Enemy*, 170 ff.) reviews modern scholarship on this figure.

⁶²² Barthold, 'Musaylima', 502. See al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān*, 1.359. Al-Askar (*al-Yamama*, 88 ff., 96 f.) is generally extremely sceptical of the beliefs attributed to Musaylima, and prefers to interpret his movement in terms of tribalism and of local economic conditions. For his part, Barthold ('Musaylima', 498) found that Musaylima's prophecy was powered by social and economic imperatives, his religious ideas having emerged later than those of Muḥammad, but independently of them – the assumption being of some kind of natural development. Contacts between Muḥammad

Monolatrous intimations

Ambient conditions arose in situations where monolatrous tendencies and monotheistic religions were making progress, or were being encouraged or actively spread by political instances. Epigraphic evidence of Yemeni polytheism became sparse from around AD 380.⁶²³ But evidence of persistent paganism cannot be excluded, on epigraphic evidence of undated inscriptions in late style.⁶²⁴ Elements of the south Arabian aristocracy,⁶²⁵ particularly royalty, seem to have been attracted to, or even embraced Judaism, later to adopt Christianity with Aksumite–Byzantine support,⁶²⁶ although this seems largely to have been confined to the notability, without whom physical evidence of religion would not have appeared in temples and inscriptions. Whether kings had converted to Judaism is unknown.⁶²⁷ This fact would not allow inference about religion on the ground. There was ultimately to be an irreversible recession of evidence of a plurality of pagan deities, replaced epigraphically by *Rḥmn*, Raḥmān (Arabic al-Raḥmān) from around 450–460,⁶²⁸ a name given to the Biblical god by both Christians and Jews and not infrequently identified as the god of the Jews (*Rbyhd*, *Rbhd*, *Rbhwd*), earlier called *ʾn* (*ʾĪlān) and variants thereof.⁶²⁹ At the same time, there was a recession in epigraphic and archaeological evidence for trans-local pagan deities such as Allāt.⁶³⁰ Yet pagan persistence among some social circles, including the notability, seems to be attested,⁶³¹ and it must be stressed that south Arabian royalty maintained a prudent religious policy bereft of zealotry, with the exception of the reign

and Musaylima are sketched in detail as they occur in the sources, uncritically, by Kister ('Struggle', 12 ff.) and with greater discrimination by Makin (*Representing the Enemy*, ch. 5).

⁶²³ The first text to which monotheistic import is ascribed seems to date from January 384: Robin, 'Du paganisme', 144, and now Gajda, *Royaume*, 45. Given what has been said above, the ascription of a monotheistic reading to references to the Lord of the Sky seems to me to be an unnecessary over-interpretation. 'Monotheist invocations' are listed in Gajda, *Royaume*, table 3.

⁶²⁴ Robin, 'Himyar et Israël', 858, which raises the question as to why the author (857) speaks of a 'radical and definitive' rejection of polytheism.

⁶²⁵ B. Ḥuṣba, B. Yaz'in, B. Ḥamdān: Robin, 'Du paganisme', 146.

⁶²⁶ Hoyland, *Arabia*, 147; Beeston, 'Himyarite monotheism', 149; Tardy, *Najrān*, 74 f.

⁶²⁷ Robin, 'Himyar et Israël', 860. ⁶²⁸ Robin, 'Du paganisme', 146.

⁶²⁹ Gajda, *Royaume*, 108 f.

⁶³⁰ Beeston, 'Himyarite monotheism', 150 f.; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 147; Krone, *al-Lāt*, 163. The *Rḥmn* inscriptions are assembled together and discussed by Robin, 'Judaïsme et christianisme'. Raḥmānā had been in circulation in late antique times in a variety of settings. It was used as a divine name in the Babylonian Talmud (rarely in the Palestinian), and in the Syriac writings of Ephrem. The term was used as a divine epithet in Palmyra, and occurs in Arabic poetry: Horovitz, 'Proper names', 201 ff. See also Gajda, *Royaume*, 108, and 109 f. for languages used.

⁶³¹ Beeston ('Harlots', 16–22) interprets the story of Ḥadramī women gloating over the death of Muḥammad in these terms, suggesting they were *ashraf* of the fractious Kinda, and that they may have been priestesses or hierodules.

of Yūsuf As'ar Yath'ar, the persecutor of the Najrān Christians following his campaign against Aksumite presence there.⁶³²

Instead of the all-purpose and immediately tangible deities, resident in temples, we witness the introduction of a cosmocratic deity.⁶³³ In addition to inscriptions with specifically confessional content mentioning *Rḥmnn* and his Son, his Messiah, Christ the Conqueror, the Holy Spirit or the People of Israel, we find inscriptions of a more generally henotheistic or monolatrous character, speaking of unnamed deities in confessionally neutral terms: Master of the Sky, Creator, Lord of the Living and the Dead, Lord of the World, and so on.⁶³⁴ This would allow the crucial inference that, though allied in certain cases with Christian and Jewish activity, these vaguely theological formulae need not be taken as necessarily betokening adherence to either of these religions outside formally Christian and Jewish circles, and that not all mention of Lord of the World,⁶³⁵ or of *Rḥmnn*, need necessarily convey a monotheistic confession. The majority of Raḥmānist texts make no specific commitment to Christianity or to Judaism.⁶³⁶ It would be interesting to learn if the Jews of northern Ḥijāz used al-Raḥmān at all as a divine name.⁶³⁷ What these Raḥmānist inscriptions did display was a new religious vocabulary ultimately serviceable to monotheism,⁶³⁸ but by no means exclusive to it, a vocabulary which, confessionally vague as it was, also had some incidence in Arabic poetry.⁶³⁹ They may well be monolatrous; but it would be surely an over-interpretation to regard them as monotheistic. There is no evidence that they are of more than local significance in a universe of religious and cultic particularism. Monotheism, in contrast, generally has universalising perspectives.

Something was surely happening, particularly in south Arabia, and farther afield to a lesser extent. But this is not something that we shall be

⁶³² Robin, 'Du paganisme', 150 f. For a detailed serial reconstruction of the religious policies of individual sovereigns, Christianising or Judaising, Gajda, *Royaume*, 51 ff.

⁶³³ Beeston, 'Himyarite monotheism', 149.

⁶³⁴ Robin, 'Du paganisme', 144 f., 147; Beaucamp *et al.*, 'Chrétiens de Naḡrān', 78.

⁶³⁵ This epithet, already encountered, is also included as a 'stock expression' on a tomb inscription at al-Ḥijr (as *mry 'lm*), in Arabic with Aramaic elements: Healey and Smith, 'Jausen-Savignac 17', JS17.7 and p. 81.

⁶³⁶ Beeston ('Himyarite monotheism', 151) asserts that they need nevertheless to be regarded as monotheistic. On the debates over the exact confessional identity of *Rḥmnn*, see Nebes, 'Martyrs', 36, 36 nn. 42–3. This scholar also insists on describing Raḥmanism as monotheistic, rather than monolatrous or henotheistic.

⁶³⁷ Robin ('Langues', 126 f.) proposes plausibly that the *Yahūdīyya* language mentioned in the sources refers to an Arabic dialect spoken in the Ḥijāz, and that only versions of Aramaic were used in north-west Arabia, in contrast to the epigraphic language of Jews in Yemen which comprised Sabaic, Hebrew and Judaeo-Aramaic.

⁶³⁸ Cf. the remarks of Gibb, 'Monotheism', 270. ⁶³⁹ Izutsu, *God and Man*, 128 ff.

closer to comprehending by interpretation according to the model of dominant, state-imposed (or infiltrating) monotheism, however much qualified, unnecessarily in my view, as 'Judaising' but not explicitly Jewish, or the evocation of *heis theos* in a manner that renders him monotheistic.⁶⁴⁰ The dichotomous model of interpretation is too constricting and simple to account for historical facts with any degree of adequacy; it confounds levels of analysis and is theologically overdetermined. Moreover, the period in question was extraordinarily turbulent, and attempts at the institution of state religions of any durability and with any chances of serious enracination were spasmodic at best rather than sustainable or cumulative. Cumulative conditions of passage to a socially enracinated monotheism did not obtain.

In sixth-century inner Arabia instances and motifs of monolatry and henotheism were not entirely novel. There is evidence of reference deities, some named and others with 'sentence names',⁶⁴¹ functional names devoid of personal names, from the vicinity of Taymā'. Earlier, from Palmyra, we have references to a Lord of Heaven and Earth, to a Lord of All, to a Lord of Eternity, to the Highest God, to the separator of night from day. In a Greek/Nabataean inscription, we have reference to a cosmocrator, often also qualified as *Rhmn*,⁶⁴² although we have seen that this cosmocrator referred to Marcus Aurelius.

These cosmocratic motifs resurfaced in the pronouncements of some prophets-*kuhhān* during the lifetime of Muḥammad, information on which has reached us highly pruned, anachronistic and very incomplete, both to incidence and to time. Sajāḥ in the north-east, al-Aswad b. Kalb al-'Ansī in Yemen and, most famously of all, Musaylima in al-Yamāma, who had reportedly been briefly wedded to Sajāḥ, all seem to have spoken of a cosmocratic deity, of al-Rahmān, of the Lord of the Clouds and, according to some possibly apocryphal traditions, of Allāh.⁶⁴³ Arabic poetry from the generation preceding Muḥammad and continuing into his own time, composed by Christians, makes reference to the Day of Judgement, to a variety of Biblical myths such as the Flood⁶⁴⁴ and Gog and Magog,⁶⁴⁵ and

⁶⁴⁰ As in Gajda, *Royaume*, 107, 116 f., 239 ff. ⁶⁴¹ Krone, *al-Lāt*, 255.

⁶⁴² *RES*, nos. 1092, 2143 ff.; Healey, *Tomb Inscriptions*, no. 2.4 and p. 93; Briquel-Chatonnet, 'Arabes', 138 f.; Dussaud, *Pénétration*, 98, 144, 144 n. 3; Kaizer, *Religious Life*, 160, 199.

⁶⁴³ 'Sajāḥ', 'al-Aswad b. Kalb al-'Ansī', 'Musaylima', *EI*; Jomier, 'Divine name', 211 n. Makin (*Representing the Enemy*, ch. 9, *passim*) studies in detail the enunciations attributed to Musaylima, with most useful comparisons with the Qur'ān in terms of style, diction, rhyme and content.

⁶⁴⁴ Hirschberg, *Lehren*, 26 ff., 30 ff., 58 ff.

⁶⁴⁵ Imru' al-Qays, in Arazi and Masalha, *Early Arab Poets*, II.2.4.

to King David.⁶⁴⁶ Such references are particularly ample in the poetry of Umayya b. Abī al-Salt, native of al-Ṭa'if, Muḥammad's contemporary and rival, and an ally and kinsman of the Umayyads.⁶⁴⁷

Tendentiously reported are the Ḥunafā' already referred to, with whom Muḥammad was said to have been associated or to whom he is reported to have had strong affinities, and who were generally said to have been linked with Mecca. Umayya b. Abī al-Saltas was reputedly among their number. We have seen that they cannot be said to have been an organised body, or to have constituted a sect properly speaking.⁶⁴⁸ It is also recognised that some of the individuals who were said to be adherents of this general tendency were receptive to new religious ideas; some were supporters of Muḥammad, but others were not.⁶⁴⁹ One of the former, of whom much is made in Muslim reports, is Waraqa b. Nawfal, who reportedly, along with others, greeted Muḥammad with the refrain '*quddūs, quddūs*', which may reflect exposure to, but not illuminate the nature of, Christian liturgy.⁶⁵⁰ Other individuals have been mentioned in this regard, including Zayd b. 'Amr b. Nufayl,⁶⁵¹ who is said to have repudiated polytheism and litholatry, and who was later assimilated to a generic Meccan Abrahamism that has

⁶⁴⁶ Al-A'shā, *Dīwān*, 12.45.

⁶⁴⁷ Umayya b. Abī al-Salt, *Diwan*, 3.1, 2, 5; 10.5–9; 31.11–16, 23–32; 62.1–5; 62.9–21; 98.1–7; 101.7–14. There has been much controversy over the authenticity of poetry attributed to this poet and about the traditional picture of him (for which, see Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shi'r*, no. 83; editor's Introduction to Umayya's *Dīwān*, 124 ff., which also takes up the sources of his poetical corpus and its history of transmission at 86 ff. 121 ff., 139 ff.; Seidensticker, 'Authenticity', 89 ff., and more recently 'Authentizität', 39 ff., where the scholarship is reviewed, and 45 ff., for a chapter-and-verse account). One scholar has very sensibly maintained that it is difficult to see why forgeries attributed to Umayya should have been made at all (Gibb, 'Monotheism', 280). Another, working from the opposite premise, sought to deny the authenticity of most of Umayya's poetry on the grounds that it is implausible that such concordances with the Qur'ān could exist, and made the point that, had this poetry been, in its turn, derived from the Qur'ān, this would have provoked public Muslim obloquy ('Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.492 ff.). But one need not share this scholar's a priori assumption, and the fact remains that this did not happen, which leaves the poetical concordance between the Qur'ān and Umayya's poetry possibly indicative of a real concordance deriving from ideas in circulation in circumstances and milieux that remain very obscure. The editor of Umayya's *Dīwān* (176 ff.) attempts elaborate internal criticism as a criterion of authentication, but nevertheless and unnecessarily excludes as implausible material that also occurs in the Qur'ān. Although there can be no definitive solution to this question, see the sober but by no means credulous considerations of Hirschberg, *Lehren*, 4 ff., which are not referred to often enough.

⁶⁴⁸ See the account of 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.457 f. See also 'Ḥanīf, *El*; Rippin', 'RḤMN'.

⁶⁴⁹ Rubin, 'Ka'ba', 96 n. 62 and *passim*.

⁶⁵⁰ Gilliot, 'Reconsidering', 92, 99 ff., 104 ff. Neuwirth ('Readings', 737) has quite correctly drawn attention to the problematic nature of trying to distinguish Christian and Jewish liturgical formulae in the Qur'ān (with reference to Baumstark, 'Gebetstypus').

⁶⁵¹ Nagel (*Mohammed*, 162) identifies him as the fundamental monotheistic influence. See *AGH*, 3.84 f. for anti-pagan poetry attributed to him.

been discussed already.⁶⁵² It would be well to keep in mind constantly that it is extremely unlikely that Christian texts were available in Arabic or in Sabaic, and that liturgical and confessional formulae are likely to have been in Syriac.⁶⁵³

That the term Ḥunafā' should have been used to designate persons who were neither Jews nor Christians, but who might otherwise have considered themselves part of a monolatrous trend reclaiming al-Raḥmān, is plausible and need not be particularly striking.⁶⁵⁴ But to contend that Ḥunafā' were proto-monotheists, or even monotheists *avant la lettre*, and that they had in common something more cohesive than a generic monolatry, is another matter altogether.

Traces of monotheism

There were also Arab Jews in northern Ḥijāz, with a long-term and important presence, and there may have been some Christians *de passage* there and elsewhere in the region⁶⁵⁵ or indeed individual Christians at Mecca and Medina.⁶⁵⁶ What kind or what inflection of Judaism and Christianity they may have represented, and to what extent theology at the cultic point of application may have been distinct from that of those who preferred al-'Uzzā, are questions that can be considered at two levels. One is conceptual, involving notions of divinity, its nature and functions, and the relationship between the votary and his or her deity, quite apart from what might be

⁶⁵² *SU*, no. 14; Nagel, *Mohammed*, 169 ff. See 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.464 ff., on these figures (and also Umayya b. Abī al-Salt, Quss b. Sā'ida and others) assimilated to what was to be known as Ḥanīfiyya, to a proto-monotheism, some mild forms of asceticism, an attitude promoting social reform, somewhat anachronistically (including opposition to the burial of infant girls, which appears ubiquitously in this context as a token of distinctiveness).

⁶⁵³ Griffith, *Church*, 9; Beaucamp *et al.*, 'Persécution', 78. Griffith ('Gospel', *passim*) doubts the existence of a proper Gospel translation into Arabic, for either liturgical or apologetic purposes, before the late ninth century.

⁶⁵⁴ Cf. Beeston, 'Himyarite monotheism', 10 f.

⁶⁵⁵ There may have been a cemetery for Christians at Dhū Tuwā near Mecca (al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 50), though it needs to be noted that what evidence there is of Christians in the Ḥijāz indicates that they were foreigners (Billhāj, *al-Masīḥiyya*, 85). See the summary of recent knowledge in Hainthaler, *Araber*, 138 f. and ch. 6, *passim*. The attempt thoroughly to Christianise Mecca, to regard the Ḥaṭīm as the apse of a church, the god of the Ka'ba as the Christian god, the idols around the Ka'ba as Christian saints, Muḥammad's enemies in Mecca as Christians, and indeed to 'restore' Christianity to Arabic poetry that had allegedly been tampered with, confounds sense, but is no more than an extreme manifestation of the tendency reductively and derivatively to construe the emergence of Islam: Andrae, *Ursprung*, 39; Lüling, *Christliche Kult*, 17 ff., 47 ff., 51 and *Einzigartige Perle*, 49 and *passim*. The internal decoration of the Ka'ba, showing Mary and Christ, among others, used as evidence (Lüling, *Christliche Kult*, 50) will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁶⁵⁶ Osman ('Arab converts') emphasises the stereotypes of asceticism and motifemic issues encountered in accounts of such, and admits the possibility of individual Christians.

implied theologically and mythologically by an exegesis of cultic practices the organised churches and rabbinate could have brought in with them. Scholarship has generally favoured approaching this matter anachronistically and from the angle of theology, rather than from practice.⁶⁵⁷

Related to the question of practice is the worship of what to others may have been an exclusive deity, but which may, at least initially, have been integrated into the system of polytheistic worship as one additional deity, a phenomenon altogether common in the history of religion. What is not often enough taken to be of consequence is that Near Eastern Christianity overall in this period was underserved by clergy and was as a result insufficiently catechised.⁶⁵⁸ The icon of Mary and Jesus in the Ka'ba is a case in point. So also would be the facts that even a Christian poet like 'Adī b. Zayd would, in the same breath, swear by the cross and the Lord of Mecca,⁶⁵⁹ and that other Christians swore by the cross, God, the Messiah, the Lord of Mecca, Nasr and al-'Uzzā.⁶⁶⁰ The so-called Ka'ba of Najrān, though a church, was also visited by the pagan Khath'am.⁶⁶¹ Ḥimyarite Christianity, like the Aksumite before the second decade of the sixth century, construed its deity in generic and transferable terms, a lord of heaven and earth rather than a confessional deity.⁶⁶²

We will need to factor in recent archaeological findings and conclude that both a *qubba* and a church may have been located with, or coincided with, the ancient semi-circular structure, dated to the appropriate period, found some 25 km north-east of al-Ukhdūd (the present name for the ancient site of Najrān). This is a double semi-circular row of stones surrounding a stone pillar, set against a granite mountainside. This type of structure, of which many have been found in Najd and south-west Arabia, probably represents litholatric and idolatrous cultic locations of which we read in the literary sources, some with troughs and granite slabs (altars?), some associated with tumuli and funerary chambers.⁶⁶³

Clearly, at least to some, Christianity was a cult of Jesus and his Cross, by which token it did not exclude others, nor was it excluded by others in this polytheistic universe. The incorporation of Christian symbols within ancestral religions needs to be seriously considered.⁶⁶⁴ That baptism, the eucharist and other distinctive beliefs and practices were ultimately shared symbols and rites, translations of a very basic and generic belief in efficacy,

⁶⁵⁷ Tannous (*Syria*, ch. 4) discusses this matter in detail and in broad perspective.

⁶⁵⁸ Tannous, *Syria*, 383 ff. ⁶⁵⁹ 'Adī b. Zayd, *Dīwān*, 3.10. ⁶⁶⁰ Bilhāj, *al-Masīhiyya*, 93.

⁶⁶¹ Bilhāj, *al-Masīhiyya*, 73. ⁶⁶² Hatke, *Africans*, 409.

⁶⁶³ Zanin *et al.*, 'Comprehensive archaeological survey', 24, 30, 31 and *passim*.

⁶⁶⁴ Fisher, *Between Empires*, 36 ff.

theologically contentless and remote from the debates of high-flying theologians and churchmen, needs to be considered.⁶⁶⁵ We have here intimations of the *interpretatio arabica* of Christian cult by some Arabs who had undergone conversion under conditions where overarching institutional control of religion was not strong, rather than an *interpretatio christiana* of Meccan rites.⁶⁶⁶

The other level of analysis is social and political, relating to the polities to whose orbit Christian and Jewish communities tended to gravitate, and the extent of cultural baggage this brought in its train. This acculturation left durable traces: doxological and mythological motifs and cultic elements, refracted, reclaimed and further carried forth, some of them in different forms, in circles that ultimately gave the social and, later, the military impulse to Paleo-Islam. What is being suggested is that echoes and traces of ambient monotheism, as well as such fragments of it as did find a place within the pagan reservation, are salient to the elaboration of Paleo-Islamic monotheism, which in its immediate environment constituted a veritable revolution. But this salience is very general, associative, and vague in its effects. One cannot speak of the Christian or Jewish 'origins' of Paleo-Islam, although these two religions did have an impact on its narrative elaboration, and most particularly when exegesis and theology came to be developed. South Arabian and other Christianities are more appropriately viewed as belonging to 'the Christian encirclement of Arabia rather than to the history of Christianity in Arabia itself'.⁶⁶⁷ Something similar might be said of Judaism.⁶⁶⁸

One censorious Victorian scholar deplored the fact that a number of Christian Arabic texts based on Greek and Coptic texts of the period from the second to the sixth centuries degraded Christ 'to the level of heathen wizards'.⁶⁶⁹ Indeed, the Arabic Nativity Gospel, for instance, is explicitly entitled the Book of the Miracles of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ.⁶⁷⁰ This need not be surprising. The highly Atticised personae of Christian holy men contained in narratives of conversion written by churchmen such as Theodoret of Cyrrhus seem unrecognisable

⁶⁶⁵ See Tannous, *Syria*, 389, 400.

⁶⁶⁶ The Christian interpretation of Meccan rites was proposed by Nagel, *Mohammed*, 750 n. 294.

⁶⁶⁷ Bell, *Origin*, 33. Not atypical of a past generation of scholarship, not altogether extinct and still thriving in certain niches, is the statement that Islam could be regarded as the 'äusserste Zweige am Stamm des Christentums', along with other 'entartete Sekten des Orients': Rudolph, *Abhängigkeit*, 90.

⁶⁶⁸ Robin ('Himyar et Israël', 880) proposes that a number of associations between Paleo-Islam and south Arabian Judaism, especially that under Abikarib, with its proposal of a unified People under God (844 ff.), were paradigmatic for Muhammad in Yathrib.

⁶⁶⁹ Smith Lewis, *Mythological Acts*, xv. ⁶⁷⁰ Thilo, *Codex Apocryphus*, 65.

when compared with some Syriac biographies and hagiographies, and with epigraphic evidence.⁶⁷¹ Stylites, monks and hermits, as well as priests ordained by non-Chalcedonian bishops, active in the conversion of pagans, used methods consonant with the requirements of a pagan population. Not the least of these was the evidentiary miracle, which seems to have carried greater authority than that of ecclesiastical jurisdiction.⁶⁷² Thaumaturgical activity by holy men antedates the spread of Christianity,⁶⁷³ and was to be continued, intensely, under a Christian signature.

Evidentiary miracles and cognate actions are generally more fully consonant with religious practice at the point of application than Christological doxologies or Eucharistic theology. The last Naṣrid king of al-Ḥīra converted to the religion of Christ after a miraculous cure in 593, as did the kings of Edessa long before, and there is much evidence that this was a widespread phenomenon. This followed a period during which the Naṣrids had had a studied ambivalence and ambiguity towards Christianity in a very complex setting.⁶⁷⁴ Starting first in the north and north-west of the Fertile Crescent, mass Christianisation at the hands of holy men, impelled by the imperial state,⁶⁷⁵ and by the Phylarcate as well⁶⁷⁶ but also by dissident churches, moved steadily across the steppe and the edges of the desert, with the process of Christianisation apparently slower the farther it proceeded – many villages in the south of what was officially and imperially Christian southern Syria, ruled by the Christian phylarchy of the Ghassānids, remained unconverted into the sixth century.⁶⁷⁷ Further east, in Iraq, there is evidence of the persistence of paganism into the first Muslim century, complete with animal sacrifices, circumambulations, idols and sacred months, rites somewhat more elaborate than we have seen above, doubtless reflecting local conditions long before the arrival of the Arabs and the Arab input as well.⁶⁷⁸

In all, evidentiary miracles leading to conversion involved such acts as the submission of wild beasts to the Christian God by means of magic circles of crosses constructed around villages, rain-bearing clouds sent by the Christian God in times of drought, the dislodging of maleficent demons by the cross, and the efficiency of curses pronounced by these holy men.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷¹ Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 2.184 ff., 166 ff. ⁶⁷² Griffith, 'Aramaic to Arabic', 22 f.

⁶⁷³ Lucian, *Dea Syria*, §§ 28 f., and cf. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 2.194.

⁶⁷⁴ Fisher, *Between Empires*, 66 ff. ⁶⁷⁵ See Sartre, *Etudes*, 143 f., 147.

⁶⁷⁶ Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber*, 64 ff., who discusses Jafnid church politics at 72 ff.

⁶⁷⁷ Segal, 'Arabs', 36; Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 2.140 ff., 166 ff., 316 f., and cf. Millar, *Roman Near East*, 519.

⁶⁷⁸ For detail: Morony, *Iraq*, 384 ff.; Hämeen-Anttila, 'Nabataean agriculture', 273 f.

⁶⁷⁹ Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 2.190 ff.

Clearly, the Christian God, like His predecessors but invoked through the cross, was involved in such mundanities as are wont to arise in an age with little control over nature and fortune, and His involvement with such mundanities and many others, some of lesser moment, is ubiquitous and unabating. The Christian God, represented by holy men such as Simon the Stylite, also witnessed vows, and received admissions of transgressions.⁶⁸⁰ The Christianity of Queen Māwīya's people might well be seen in this perspective, occasioned by healing and other forms of magical efficacy; her insistence on the appointment of her own bishop will have been a political gesture. When the Naṣrid al-Nu'mān gave his subjects leave to become Christian, he did so out of reach of his Sasanian overlord, at an encampment in Syria, probably somewhere east of Damascus, according to a report related by Sabinus, Prefect of Damascus,⁶⁸¹ a fact clearly reflecting the ebbs and flows of Arab principalities to their imperial overlords.

Pathways of organised religion

Whatever political gestures were worth at the point of application, and crucial as these were for the further development of an œcumenical fulfilment of divine mission that eventually became the Muslim polity, the final phases of Christianisation of the phylarchic border tribes in the erstwhile Provincia Arabia came with the formation of an ethnically Arab episcopate, and the designation by Juvenal of Jerusalem (d. 458) of a 'bishop of encampments'.⁶⁸² But central and western Arabia were not only bordered by Christianised lands to the north. This pagan reservation was in fact surrounded by Christian polities, and populations whose Christianity was largely of indeterminate character and uncertain extent, theologically porous and minimal.

From the early fifth century, dyophysite synods had a constant Arab representation, including a Metropolitan of Beth 'Arbāyē.⁶⁸³ The Jacobites seem to have had considerable success in the desert through itinerant

⁶⁸⁰ Doran, *Lives*, 79. It is useful to bear in mind, when using hagiographic texts, that the Christianisation of the Arabs in such sources served as 'mere foils for the saints' piety, lacking all agency in the story': Wood, *We have no King*, 232. Fisher (*Between Empires*, 36) points out that accounts of Arab conversions to Christianity obscure the social, political and cultural effects that go beyond the passive acceptance of the new religion.

⁶⁸¹ Doran, *Lives*, 146 f., 159 (on the baptism of Arabs), 81, 94 f., 98 (the conversion of unnamed Arab kings and a queen).

⁶⁸² Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 2.172 f.

⁶⁸³ Segal, 'Arabs', 115 f. Christian preaching among the nomadic populations is discussed by Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber*, 59 ff.

bishops who administered sacraments and used magic, incantations and conjurations with the aid of fragments from the Psalms.⁶⁸⁴ There are archaeological remains of Christian buildings on islands off the coast of the Arabian Gulf, and in what are today Qatar and Oman, with evidence of abandonment in the late seventh or early eighth century. Whether this is to be correlated to the weakening of the Sasanians,⁶⁸⁵ who generally supported Nestorianism against the imperial Church, or with the direct effect of the beginnings of Islamisation, cannot be determined. It is of course extremely difficult properly to gauge the extent of the spread of Christianity in these parts as in others,⁶⁸⁶ such as al-Yamāma and Najd, where it seems to have been brought by Kinda, or further north, where Christianity was better advanced in the vicinity of Jabal Ṭay' and elsewhere.⁶⁸⁷ Christianity was well established among the B. Taghlib, as is well known, and among the aristocratic sections of Shaybān of the Bakr b. Wā'il.⁶⁸⁸

Christianity seems to have been durably and institutionally established to the north-west of central Arabia, in Jafnid territories, from which Christian impulses, examples and conceptions may have made their way into Hijāz.⁶⁸⁹ This was a Miaphysite Christianity, the key moment of which was three bishops that had been requested from Theodora by al-Ḥārith in 542; elsewhere in Syria the Chalcedonian church prevailed, while the Jafnids created for themselves a distinctive niche within the empire by their sponsorship of a semi-independent church in whose politics they were deeply involved.⁶⁹⁰ This said, it is also fair to say that there is no evidence for a hard Miaphysitism on the part of the Jafnids in the fluid religious landscape of Syria, and that the boundaries between Chalcedonians and Miaphysites were not to solidify before the 580s.⁶⁹¹

Churches, monasteries and bishoprics also existed in al-Ḥīra and territories it controlled, with more elaborate worship and availability of monasteries and churches than in the steppe.⁶⁹² Christianity in Iraq was well implanted and institutionalised, with strong but complex relations to the Sasanian state.⁶⁹³ It must be noted that churches were organised along tribal lines, in al-Ḥīra as well as in Jafnid territories, extending the phenomenon of Arab cultic associations to the Christian churches,⁶⁹⁴ a matter

⁶⁸⁴ Charles, *Christianisme*, 96 f., 101 f.; Arbache, 'Bible', 41, 42 f.

⁶⁸⁵ Hellyer, 'Nestorian Christianity', 82 f., 88 ff. ⁶⁸⁶ See the remarks of Arbache, 'Bible', 45 f.

⁶⁸⁷ Bilhāj, *al-Masīhiyya*, 81, 84; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 1.289. Ibn Ḥazm (*Jamhara*, 491) provides a tally of Arab tribal sections affected by Christianisation.

⁶⁸⁸ Donner, 'Bakr b. Wā'il', 26. ⁶⁸⁹ Fowden, 'Lamp', 2 ff.

⁶⁹⁰ Wood, *We have no King*, 249 ff. ⁶⁹¹ Fisher, *Between Empires*, 60 f., 61 n. 114.

⁶⁹² Bilhāj, *al-Masīhiyya*, 90 ff. ⁶⁹³ The situation is described in detail by Morony, *Iraq*, 332 ff.

⁶⁹⁴ Morony, *Iraq*, 221; Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 162 ff.

continued later by the foundation of tribal mosques in al-Kūfa.⁶⁹⁵ In all cases, it cannot realistically be supposed that Christian impulses that may have been felt in our pagan reservation would have much exceeded vague generic statements about deity, and the cult of Christ and his Cross. There was certainly contact, direct through proselytising individuals coming into central and western Arabia from the east and the south, and of course in southern Syria and Iraq through merchants and other travellers, as well as indirect, at second or third hand. Much of this would have been made through the peculiar and distant figures of ascetic and vatic monks, itinerant or resident in caves and on crags,⁶⁹⁶ and of the evangelising priest, in which context one might mention the missions sent out by Jacob Baradeus (d. 578) and John of Ephesus (d. c. 586). With their asceticism and their clappers, such persons left quite an impression on Arabic poetry, no less than on Muḥammad,⁶⁹⁷ a man of extraordinarily quick intelligence, endowed with a spirit uncommonly alert, nimble and bold.⁶⁹⁸

In Yemen, both Judaism and Christianity proved to be relatively short-lived. A small group of Christian churches is attested, destroyed by the Ḥimyarite sovereign Yūsuf As'ar Yath'ar, possibly a usurper, as he promoted Judaism and pursued the persecution of Christians in 523, culminating in the massacre at Najrān.⁶⁹⁹ The sectarian picture in Yemen is complex, involving conflicts between Julianists (after Julian of Halicarnassus, d. after 521, who took his Miaphysism to the claim that Christ's body was incorruptible from the point of conception, a doctrine called

⁶⁹⁵ Ju'ayt, *al-Kūfa*, 312 ff.

⁶⁹⁶ Cf. Bosworth, 'Madyan Shu'ayb', 63, with reference to the north-west of the Peninsula.

⁶⁹⁷ Wellhausen, 'Mohammedanism', 546 n. 2; Bell, *Origin*, 43 ff. and *Commentary*, 2.354; Fowden, 'Lamp', 5, 8 f.; 'Monasticism and monks', *EQ*, 3.406. That Bahīra, the monk who supposedly recognised the youthful Muḥammad as a prophet and tutored him, may have been a legendary figure was already noted over a century ago by Hirschberg (*New Researches*, 22 ff.). One needs to note, nevertheless, that the frame of the story is not implausible, as noted by Fowden, 'Lamp', 1. On Bahīra and Muḥammad, see *SIH*, 1.165 f., 172. St John of Damascus would have him be an Arian monk (Sahas, *John of Damascus*, 173 f.), and this figure was subsequently to play a very important role in Christian anti-Muslim polemics: Tolan, *Saracens*, 'Bahīra' in Index.

⁶⁹⁸ It is interesting to note that Torrey (*Jewish Foundation*, 132) asserted of Muḥammad that 'the originality of the man remains more impressive than his dependence', having in earlier years (*Commercial-Theological Terms*, 49) held that 'lack of originality might almost be called his chief characteristic as compared with other founders of religious systems'.

⁶⁹⁹ The date is in some dispute: de Blois ('Date') opts for 518, while Shahid ('Chronology') prefers to reconfirm AD 523; so also Beaucamp *et al.*, 'Persécution', which remains to date the most comprehensive and thorough review of chronology. On this episode, see Shahid, *Martyrs*, and Gajda, *Royaume*, 97 ff. For the various interpretations, see Daghfous, *Yaman*, 110 ff.; for the international setting and conflicts of relevance to interpretation of this episode, see Smith, 'Events', 459 ff.

Aphthartodocetism, adopted by Justinian towards the end of his life),⁷⁰⁰ Nestorians and Chalcedonians, each supported by a variety of external political instances, and many finding refuge there from persecution in the north.⁷⁰¹ What may be relevant is the existence of Arab clerics, established on onomastic evidence.⁷⁰² All that can be said in this regard is that Christianisation, quite apart from the work of holy men, most especially in areas limitrophic to regions with a strong Christian presence, was connected with imperial politics and their extensions and counter-evangelisation by non-Chalcedonian churches. Yemenite and Najrāni Christianity was a product of the route to and from al-Ḥīra, and not without connection with the Jafnids, as well as with Byzantium through Ethiopia and, finally, with the religious politics of the Sasanians under Khusro II.⁷⁰³

Whether these Christianities, at their points of application, had more of Christianity in them on the ground than invocations of a generic supra-celestial deity, and the worship of Jesus and the cross, and some form of ecclesiastical presence, is unclear. Similarly, whether Jews of south Arabia had much more to their Judaism than the cry of 'Adonai, Adonai', and possibly a cult of the Torah scroll, as they rampaged during an anti-Christian pogrom, as reported by Simeon's New Letter on the Martyrs of Najrān,⁷⁰⁴ is also unclear, and the picture of Arab Judaism in Late Antiquity, as of Jews overall during this period, is extremely scanty.⁷⁰⁵ But we do know that these Jews are said to have thought it blasphemous to believe that Adonai could have had a son,⁷⁰⁶ and one would expect certain matters of observance, especially the standard distinctive tokens of a regime of ritual purity and alimentary abstentions, to have prevailed. A virtually

⁷⁰⁰ 'Aphthartodocetism' and 'Julian of Halikarnassos', *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1.129, 2.1080; Frend, *Monophysite Christianity*, 253 f. On Julianism in Najrān specifically, Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber*, 133 f.; On Justinian and the doctrine of Jesus' body being *aparthon*, Uthemann, 'Kaiser Justinian', 79 ff.

⁷⁰¹ On the province of Arabia and Arabia proper as a destination of exile and refuge for dissident clerics condemned by the imperial church (followers of John Chrysostom after 404, of Nestorius after 435, Nestorius himself having been exiled to Cyril's turf in Egypt), see Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber*, 56.

⁷⁰² Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishtiqāq*, 434; Piotrovskii, *al-Yaman*, 241 ff.; Billhāj, *al-Masīhiyya*, 72 ff.

⁷⁰³ Tardy, *Najrān*, 77 ff., 93 ff., 118 ff., 149 ff.; Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs*, 374 f.; Flusin, *Anastase*, 2, ch. iv *passim*; Frend, *Monophysite Christianity*, 304 ff.; Hatke, *Africans*, 404. Hainthaler (*Christliche Araber*, 129) considers the possibility of Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian bishops in Yemen simultaneously, in different locations. As to the Christological profile, Briquel-Chatonnet ('Expansion', 183) describes Yemenite Christianity as 'pre-Chalcedonian'.

⁷⁰⁴ Shahid, *Martyrs*, 47.

⁷⁰⁵ Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 17 f. A most helpful summary of the state of knowledge and scholarship about Arab Jews at that time is given by Zeitlin, *Historical Muhammad*, chs. 5 and 6.

⁷⁰⁶ Shahid, *Martyrs*, 53.

duotheistic worship of Yahweh and 'Uzayr by Medinan Jews cannot be excluded, and neither can one exclude that Jews and other monotheists came to accept Arab deities as angels.⁷⁰⁷

Thus little could be said of these monotheistic religions across the Arabian Peninsula and along the caravan routes, apart from what might be gathered from a few crosses, inscriptions about *Rḥmnn* being Lord of Heaven and Earth and his Son being designated a Victor (*glbⁿ*), and the legend *kyrios*, all indicating a Christianity *de passage*.⁷⁰⁸ The same might be said of Christianity in Mecca and Medina,⁷⁰⁹ if one accepts it had a presence there over and above that of itinerants.⁷¹⁰ All of this would accord well with the view that Biblical material in the Qur'ān is almost completely missing in the chronologically earliest sections of the text, to be followed by its introduction 'with cryptic brevity smacking of unfamiliarity',⁷¹¹ all of which would give the impression of material known at second hand. This must surely have applied in most cases, although one must be ever alert to the possibility of closer knowledge, however retained, by Muḥammad and others on visits to Syria. The references to Biblical themes in the early portions of the Qur'ān bear testimony to recall that is more than entirely casual or fortuitous.⁷¹² The question of Biblical intertexts in the Qur'ān is most often treated unreflectively, without due attention to aspects more interesting than possible quotations, and indeed to the very comparability of the texts in question.⁷¹³

As for Jews in the Ḥijāz and north-west Arabia, their presence is older and better attested. How they came to be there, and how locals converted and why, is unclear. They are likely to be connected with movements and developments, including conversion, following the Hasmonaean expansion and their imposition of Judaism upon the Edomites to the south-east of the Jordan, towards the end of the second century BC. This region had political and ethnological extensions further south, which will, in those slow-moving

⁷⁰⁷ Crone, 'Religion', 192 ff., 200.

⁷⁰⁸ Beaucamp and Robin, 'Christianisme', 55, 47 ff.

⁷⁰⁹ Cheikhō, *al-Nuṣrāniyya*, 114 ff.

⁷¹⁰ Shahīd (*Byzantium and the Arabs*, 525 f.) asserts that there were monasteries in northern Ḥijāz.

⁷¹¹ Rabin, 'Qumrān sect', 11.

⁷¹² The onomastic discussion of Muḥammad's 'informers', painstakingly reconstructed by one scholar recently and found to be freedmen and other persons of humble station, of foreign origin and of religions difficult to ascertain (Gilliot, 'Informateurs', 84–126), would appear in this context to be adventitious. There is no doubt that there were such persons, and that there were Jews in Medina and elsewhere, but this tells us little about the composition of the Qur'ān. For earlier scholarship, Torrey, *Jewish Foundation*, 7, 12 ff., 43.

⁷¹³ This question has now been treated in detail by Neuwirth, *Koran*, ch. 10, including reflections on comparability (563 ff.), typology, allegory and exemplarity (577 ff., 603 ff.), and a variety of other matters arising.

times, have conveyed later population movements and Judaeo-Christian groups. Conversion is likely, in the usual manner, to have been a function of forms of dominance they achieved. Whatever the origins and earlier history, Jews are attested not only in Medina and Khaybar, but in and around Taymā' and Dūmat al-Jandal, in many areas of which they appear to have been dominant as chiefly lineages. They are reported to have had kinship ties with other Arab tribes,⁷¹⁴ to have maintained fortresses, and to have been significant enough to merit the dispatch of Jafnid expeditions.⁷¹⁵ This may reflect an association between them and the Persians; the B. al-Naḍīr and B. Qurayẓa of Medina may even have collected taxes for the Sasanians through the Marzbān in Baḥrayn, as mentioned above.⁷¹⁶ Their dominion over Medina and adjacent territories has even been seen as a movement paralleling the rise of Christianity in Najrān, which would place the two phenomena in synchrony with each other as well as with moments in Sasanian–Byzantine relations.⁷¹⁷ Poetry of these Arab Jews was indistinguishable from other ancient Arabic poetry, in terms of both themes and social values.⁷¹⁸

Despite this, precious little is known about the nature of their Judaism, but this has not constrained some scholars from drawing exaggerated results from, and making anachronistic assumptions about, the nature of Mishnaic and Talmudic materials (which make no mention of Arabian Jews) they may have transmitted to Muḥammad and his entourage.⁷¹⁹ The contention that there was some measure of messianic or even apocalyptic ebullience among these Jews seems to be an unnecessary and unwarranted assumption.⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁴ Details of Arab Jewish genealogies in *AGH*, 22.77 ff.

⁷¹⁵ Altheim and Stiehl, *Araber*, 306 ff.; Newby, *Jews*, 53 ff.; Ibn Sa'īd, *Nashwa*, 1.188 ff., 2.815 ff.; 'Ghassān', *EL*.

⁷¹⁶ Altheim and Stiehl, *Araber*, 363 f.

⁷¹⁷ Smith, 'Events', 462 f., who also mentions the unlikely story that the Ḥimyarite sovereign Abū Karīb As'ad converted to Judaism in Medina.

⁷¹⁸ Newby, *Jews*, 56 f. The themes, moods and sentiments shared by Arabic poetry written by Jewish and gentile Arabs has been extended to a kinship between ancient Arabic poetry and ancient Hebrew poetry, 'markedly Arabian in feeling, in texture, and in expression', and betraying an 'extraordinary resemblance': Lyall, 'Relation', 256, 258 and *passim*.

⁷¹⁹ See the remarks of Rodinson, 'Critical survey', 55.

⁷²⁰ Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 49 ff. That Jews famously needed to decide whether Muḥammad was the Promised One need not betoken a messianic mood, and may have been whimsically bookish. See also Stroumsa, 'False prophet', 294 f. The reports (*SIH*, 2.118 ff., 138) that Muḥammad wrote to the Jews of Khaybar associating himself with Moses and describing himself as the confirmation of what Moses brought forth, and that the converted Jew 'Abd Allāh b. Sallām assured Jews that Muḥammad was prefigured in the Torah (notions mentioned in the Qur'ān) convey the same sense. Ibn Sallām figures in Muslim traditions as an important source of Biblical narrative material ('Abd Allāh b. Sallām', *EL*).

Indeed, it has long been realised that the state of our knowledge of this Judaism is such that the Qur'ān may well be our only sure source.⁷²¹ Archaeological remains of Jewish structures in and related to northern Ḥijāz reveal Biblical citations, references to major Jewish figures, or symbols such as the menorah;⁷²² poetry written by Jews contains no references to beliefs. Median Jews are reported to have had access to some form of religious texts, the *asfār* (Q, 62.5).⁷²³ Qur'ānic references to the Psalter (*al-Zabūr*) are indicative, and are supported by independent evidence of writing on wood,⁷²⁴ but more than this cannot be said. Late antique evidence for more central lands would suggest that, by the sixth century, synagogues had spread fairly widely in the Palestinian countryside, and that the Torah scroll came to assume an increasing importance, as holy object and as a text to perform aloud (as distinct from to study or gloss), with a translation (in Palestine, into Aramaic).⁷²⁵ It also seems that Arab Jews may have entered into relations, however irregular, with religious centres in Palestine and southern Iraq, and that they maintained a little-understood distinction among their scholars between *rabbānīyūn* and *aḥbār*,⁷²⁶ not least as it is unclear to what degree and in which way the Rabbinism still in process of formation in metropolitan centres, especially Iraq, would have been replicated in Arabia. Nevertheless, though it is not implausible that they maintained some kind of educational establishment, possibly a Bēt Midrāsh in Medina of uncertain character and function, this does not seem to justify maintaining that they constituted the 'monotheistic elite' of Muḥammad.⁷²⁷

Finally, though there are some indications in the sources for the presence in Arabia (and in Mecca) of possible traces of Manichaeism and Mazdaism,⁷²⁸ this seems highly implausible.⁷²⁹ The same applies to echoes

⁷²¹ Hirschberg, *Lehren*, 19 n. 4. ⁷²² Robin, 'Ḥimyar et Isra'el', 864.

⁷²³ Newby (*Jews*, 59 ff.) suggests that the pseudoepigraphic Book of Enoch was important in defining the beliefs of Ḥijāzi Jews, replete with anthropomorphism and the worship of the Matatron, who acts as a substitute creator, and with belief in the translation to heaven of Elijah, Ezra and Enoch.

⁷²⁴ 'Al-Zabūr', *EL*. ⁷²⁵ Schwarz, *Imperialism*, 240 ff.

⁷²⁶ Newby, *Jews*, 49, 57 f., and see de Prémare, *Ta'īs*, 344 ff.

⁷²⁷ Lecker, 'Zayd b. Thābit', 263 ff., 271.

⁷²⁸ The two are often confused, and indications are that it is the former which requires closer scrutiny: Simon, 'Mānī', 132 n. 63. It has been claimed, further, that the king Imru' al-Qays represented a Manichaean form of Christianity, that 'Amr b. Adī was Manichaean, and that Arab merchants were conduits for the transmission of this religion (Simon, 'Mānī', 130 ff. and the sources there indicated).

⁷²⁹ This is very well brought out, with precision, by Chokr (*Zandaqa*, 310 ff.), and interpreted in terms of retrojections and lampoons; the question is raised (317) as to how Mazdaism, profoundly connected to a particular understanding of social structure, may have been appropriated in Arabian conditions.

of Baptist sects in Iraq at the time of Muḥammad, motifs from which may have been incorporated, if at all, only in the course of the exegetical elaboration of the Qur'ān.⁷³⁰ It would surely be a wild exaggeration to claim that Islam's first appearance was as 'a non-conformist off-shoot of Manichaeism',⁷³¹ despite some reports of Manichaean and Mazdean echoes among some individuals of Quraysh (including, bizarrely, Abū Sufyān himself), attributed to relations with al-Ḥīra, but otherwise undefined, and, earlier, among the Kinda and Tamīm.⁷³²

Scripturalist possibilities and impossibilities

What does nevertheless seem to have filtered through and spread around, and found its way into the Qur'ān eventually, is less a coherent doctrine than a number of doxological and mythological motifs, theologoumena and mythemes, deriving from ambient religions. In scriptural terms, what we have are echoes of folk *midrāshim* and of the two Testaments.⁷³³ These echoes are fragmentary and dispersed, providing narrative material and illustrative anecdotes, all party to Qur'ānic bricolage, this last term used without any hint of disparagement to indicate the use of material in a context other than that of its original semantic motivation.⁷³⁴

Portions of the Gospels, very likely as redacted in the *Diatessaron*, may have circulated in the Ḥijāz and in Najrān, most likely in Syriac,⁷³⁵ and in all likelihood existed in some Arabic version, possibly fragmentary, at

⁷³⁰ Dāwūd (*al-Zandaqa*, 56 ff.) is clear about the importance of later glosses in the conception of such an image, but unfortunately (at 97 ff., 187 ff., 198) goes ahead and discusses pre-Islamic Arabs in these terms, using the term in a loose way. See Chokr, *Zandaqa*, 307.

⁷³¹ Gil, 'Creed', 22. Concordances between Manichaean ideas and the Qur'ān are well brought out by Simon, 'Mānī', 133 ff., without pretending that they are any more than concordances of ideas, adopting what he calls a 'typological viewpoint' (at 125), but with a certain typological summariness regarding Islam when indicating the differences between the religions (at 127). The question of transmission has been posed by Colpe, *Siegel*, 207 ff. Methodologically, Simon's procedure is congruent with that of O'Shaughnessy, *Development*, *passim*, where there are indications throughout of possible Ebionite and Gnostic precedents for the Qur'ānic notion of the Spirit (*rūḥ*), based on textual and doxographic concordances, but not on concrete historical filiation. When no definite textual or historical filiation is found, recourse is made commonly to the idea of an indefinite 'common substratum', and, not infrequently, to the surreal superaddition of names standing for historical filiations: thus Islam has been regarded as a Nazarean Judaeo-Christian tradition to which another common ground, between Manichaeism and Elkasaism, was relevant, with a Pseudo-Clementine notion of prophecy (de Blois, 'Elchasai', 32, 34 f., 44 f.).

⁷³² Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 49, 161; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif*, 621.

⁷³³ Peters, 'Historical Muḥammad', 296.

⁷³⁴ Cf. Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 214, 225, 540–1 n. 310. This consideration extends also to the Qur'ānic use of personal names that occur in the Bible; Sycz (*Eigennamen*) divides his consideration of Biblical names in the Qur'ān precisely into the two categories of motivated (ch. 3) and unmotivated (ch. 4).

⁷³⁵ On the Syriac *Diatessaron*, considered an authoritative scripture, see Brock, *Bible*, 18, 31 f.

al-Ruṣāfa and al-Ḥīra, reflected in the poetry of 'Adī b. Zayd. It is in 'Adī b. Zayd's poetic corpus, produced around the court of al-Ḥīra, that the Arabic term for the Gospels, *al-Injīl*, is first attested.⁷³⁶ The Gospels, probably only in part, were later translated into Arabic in the lands of Tanūkh to the north in the 630s.⁷³⁷ Finally, it has often been presumed, without evidence direct or indirect, that a Christian lectionary existed in the Ḥijāz, but this is extremely improbable.⁷³⁸ More plausibly, and based on a number of indications internal to the Qur'ān, it has been claimed that Muḥammad and his milieu were somewhat familiar with the Syriac version of the *Diatessaron*.⁷³⁹ It may be recalled that this text also served liturgical purposes, and that its use persisted despite the attempt by Theodoret, bishop of Cyrrihus (d. c. 457), to suppress it in favour of the Peshitta of c. 400.⁷⁴⁰ The Arabic version that we have is a product of the eleventh century.

A proper consideration would need more than resort to the all too common procedure of scouring heresiologies and scriptures to identify textual concordances,⁷⁴¹ or otherwise refer to some common Semitic

⁷³⁶ Griffith, 'Gospel', 131, 146 f., 153 f.; Shahid, *Martyrs*, 242 ff.; Toral-Niehoff, 'Gestaltung', 241 ff., 254 f. – Toral-Niehoff asserts, however, that the term derives from the Ge'ez *wangel*. How an Ethiopian word entered the Arabic of Iraq where the Greek *evangelion* and its Syriac derivative were available remains a mystery.

⁷³⁷ Baršūm, *al-Lu'lu'*, 279; al-Sharfi, *al-Fikr al-Islāmi*, 409; Haddad, *Trinité divine*, 14.

⁷³⁸ It is surprising that scholars who have dwelt on the existence of a lectionary, or even argued that the Qur'ān itself was modelled on such or was an Arabic redaction of such a Christian text, have been insufficiently attentive to the history of this genre. The earliest Greek lectionaries date from the fifth century, but the idea of using them became popular only some centuries later. There is no evidence for the existence of Syriac lectionaries before the ninth century, and the possibility of the existence of earlier ones that have not survived has been examined and adjudged to be highly unlikely; evidence from Biblical manuscripts in Syriac shows that the location of lections was indicated by the insertion of lectionary headings, often in red: Brock, *Bible*, 50 f.

⁷³⁹ Van Reeth 'Evangile', 158 ff., 169 f.) argued, in a preference for the roundabout, that it was filtered through Manichaeism. What needs to be kept in mind is that no Biblical manuscripts containing any part of the Syriac *Diatessaron* survive; the text is usually reconstructed from the commentary of St Ephrem the Syrian (d. c. 373), which does not, in its turn, survive in the original Syriac (Brock, *Bible*, 48).

⁷⁴⁰ On the Peshitta and other Syriac translations of the Old and New Testaments, Brock, *Bible*, 17 f.

⁷⁴¹ This is a standard practice in scholarship, and was rightly criticised by Torrey (*Jewish Foundation*, 7) on grounds of being infinitely regressive and indiscriminate, only for him to assert that Muḥammad received Christian materials from the Jews. See the corrective statements, somewhat skewed, of Grimme, *Muhammad*, 2.48 f., 60 f., 63, of Bell, *Origin*, 67 f. and of Rudolph, *Abhängigkeit*, 72 f. A very detailed listing of Qur'ān/New Testament concordances is provided by Ahrens, 'Christliches'. It may not be irrelevant to suggest that this procedure of drawing parallels and concordances, and the correlative procedure of working with etymologies, trilateral roots and cognates far and near, in search of origins, confuses origin with historical provenance, and often encounters technical problems. One such problem is linguistic competence and preferential slants (see, for instance, the severe criticism of Geiger's *Was hat Muhammed aus den Judenthume aufgenommen* by Fleischer, 'Über das Arabische', who maintained, in detail, that the parallels and origins sought by Geiger reflected a bias towards Hebrew and Aramaic, complemented by inadequate Arabic). What matter

fund,⁷⁴² in order to explain the vocabulary of Qur'ān. Nevertheless, the more productive approach would seem to be one that, when considering the salience of, for instance, Judaism to the formation of Paleo-Islam, would regard this as having supplied the leaven for Arab meal; Judaic meal was supplied in later times.⁷⁴³

The contention that what Muḥammad received from ambient monotheisms, fragmentary as well as articulated, or that what he decided to adopt and adapt from them was not entirely consistent has already been made. This would lead us to one such body of fragments, these being the fragments of earlier Judaeo-Christian sects, often, without further specification, described as Gnostic,⁷⁴⁴ echoes of whose beliefs occur in the Qur'ān. Two main problems need to be kept in mind. The first is that there is no evidence for the existence of such sects in Arabia, and most had disappeared nearly half a millennium before Muḥammad.⁷⁴⁵ The other relates to the character of some scholarship referred to in the last few paragraphs, it having been contended that, as it seems that none could prove that Islam was based on Jewish or on Christian borrowings, scholars seeking to follow the trail of origins came up with the Judaeo-Christian theme.⁷⁴⁶

The connection between the religion of Muḥammad and early Christian sects is one about which much was written, from a very early date. It had been the mainstay of medieval anti-Muslim polemics that regarded Muḥammad as an arch-heretic, and his religion as the sum of all heresies.⁷⁴⁷ This connection was taken up again, this time in a positive light shed upon Islam, with greater learning made available by Humanist scholarship and in the context of intra-Christian polemics following the Reformation and the

ultimately are the actual historical conditions, means and agencies of influence, and the purposes behind receiving influence, including modes of avowal and disavowal. These are historical questions; the search for origins is rather ideological, and is usually content with comparing texts, or attempting to derive practices from texts. This etymological and morphological procedure had for long dogged Old Testament studies, which have since corrected themselves (Barr, *Biblical Language*, 100 ff., 158 and ch. 6, *passim*). Usener himself warned against such procedure (*Götternamen*, 6 f.). See overall the comments of Rodinson, *Mystique*, 92 f.

⁷⁴² These two methodological assumptions are clearly set out as the two established alternatives by Bishop (Preserved tablets', 252 f.) who draws attention to a number of textual concordances between the Qur'ān and the Qumran scrolls (Bishop, 'Scrolls'): expressions like the Friend of God, the Angel of Truth, the notion of righteousness, memories of ancient sinners, enjoining fighting in the way of God, and other matters. But overall, the analysis assumes a post-exegetical Qur'ān, and emphasis on textual concordances.

⁷⁴³ Wellhausen, 'Mohammedanism', 547.

⁷⁴⁴ On caution required in the use of this term, see Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*.

⁷⁴⁵ Van Ess, 'Siegel', 54; Griffith, 'Syriacisms', 85 ff.

⁷⁴⁶ Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 171 f.

⁷⁴⁷ Perhaps most clearly and synoptically expressed by Peter the Venerable: *Correspondence*, 149, and see Tolan, *Saracens*, *passim*.

rise of Unitarianism, by the Deist John Toland, who proposed a continuum between the three monotheistic religions, of which Mohammedanism is the last phase, eliminating accretions of fantastic dogma, and obtaining inspiration from Judaeo-Christian sects, especially the Ebionites, thereby constituting a moment of the original, Nazarene, Christianity.⁷⁴⁸ More than a century and a half later, Adolf von Harnack took up this theme in a more systematic and historical manner. Wishing to account for concordances between Islam and Christianity, von Harnack saw in Islam the workings of the transformations of Christianity since the second century, and again highlighted the salience of variants of Judaeo-Christianity which, he saw, overlapped geographically with lands in which Islam was to grow.⁷⁴⁹ Since then, there has been a considerable amount of research and writing on this topic.

There may well have been traces of Judaeo-Christian sects and motifs in Trans-Jordan, Syria and Arabia, some of them isolated until the Muslim conquests, such as the Nazareans, Ebionites, Elkasaites, and Kollyridians or Maryans, or at least of ideas previously associated with such sects, persisting in forms combined and truncated.⁷⁵⁰ But one must bear in mind the extreme difficulty of disengaging these movements, of ascribing to them any social and dogmatic consistency and distinctiveness. One will need to keep in mind the likelihood of a variety of possible combinations beyond the consistency that would define each of these groups as such; received definitions and demarcations themselves are derived from older heresiographic sources such as Epiphanius (d. 403), and need to be treated with great care.⁷⁵¹ Finally, given the doctrinal minimalism of ambient Christianity, with some bishops excepted, it would be difficult to speak of serious demarcations.

Closer to the time when Paleo-Islam emerged, the continuing existence of ideas considered by some bishops as heretical on the fringes of the steppe and within it is indicated, but these ideas are identifiable only by the names of particular holy men or clerics, without further specification.⁷⁵² The vagaries of the possible presence of groups in continuity with Judaeo-Christian sects at the time of Muḥammad and thereafter have been charted, provisionally and perhaps much too enthusiastically and assertively;⁷⁵³ it

⁷⁴⁸ Toland, *Nazarenus*, 9 f., 14 ff. ⁷⁴⁹ Von Harnack, *Lehrbuch*, 2.529, 533, 534 ff.

⁷⁵⁰ Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber*, 54 f.

⁷⁵¹ Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 1.18.1.1–3, 30.2.4, 30.15.3–4, 19.3.5, 19.5.4–5; 2.620 ff.; Eusebius, *History*, 6.33.1, 6.37.1.

⁷⁵² So, according to sixth-century Syriac canons (V. Menze, personal communication). It must be said that a similar phenomenon was later to be found in Muslim heresiography.

⁷⁵³ Pines, *Jewish Christians*, 34 ff.

would be safer to speak of theologoumena and mythemes, rather than of groups. These last, particularly from southern Iraq, had some influence, primarily mythographic, on the emergence of Muslim traditions of various tendencies and descriptions.⁷⁵⁴

In the final analysis, the Qur'ān tells us more about Judaeo-Christian ideas and motifs in circulation than the dogmas of Judaeo-Christian groups can tell us about the Qur'ān. One must be careful not to conclude from the concordances noted by von Harnack and others that Muḥammad was connected to any specific sect, and be aware of the heterogeneity of the fragments he adopted.⁷⁵⁵ One needs to be careful also not to infer from the possible existence of the Pseudo-Valentinian theme of a scripture corrupted⁷⁵⁶ the actual existence of Ebionites in fourth-century Syria, not to speak of sixth-century Arabia. One needs to be wary of reading into obscure references to al-Maghāriyya a reference to the persistence of Essenes.⁷⁵⁷ Moreover, reticence is called for when explaining the persistence of older religious motifs in terms of a transmission of doctrines, rather than of doctrinal and mythical fragments.

Further, larger-scale systemic surmises, such as the suggestion that Arabian Jews were in fact Judaeo-Christian sects seen to have stood at the origin of the Qur'ānic conception of the Seal of Prophecy,⁷⁵⁸ may be suggestive, but are difficult to use consequentially, even as heuristic tools. To propose the existence of Judaeo-Christian Nazareans in central Arabia, 'unnoticed by the outside world',⁷⁵⁹ and that Qur'ānic references to Christians, Naṣāra, was to these,⁷⁶⁰ is fanciful. For one thing, the Qur'ānic

⁷⁵⁴ For instance, the possible incidence of Docetic and Valentinian themes in relation to certain messianic ideas propounded by 'Abd Allāh b. Saba', in association with Qur'ānic ideas about the crucifixion of Jesus: Tucker, *Mahdis*, 14 ff.

⁷⁵⁵ Cf. Andrae, *Ursprung*, 2, 5 f.

⁷⁵⁶ Barton, 'Unity and diversity', 14. Andrae (*Ursprung*, 110) had in a similar context spoken of the Pseudo-Clementine *nomos aionos*, and the eternal Book sent to all prophets.

⁷⁵⁷ For instance, Golb, 'Magāriyya', 347 ff., 358 ff., though the author, at 332 f., does speak of difficulties of identification. See the comments of Wasserstrom, *Muslim and Jew*, 39, 39 n. 99. For his part, Philonenko ('Tradition', 143) denies the persistence of Essenianism as such, but, inspired by Renan, sees Esseno-Ebionism as a legitimate Judaeo-Christian heir of this sect, and (at 145 ff.) proposes a case for tracing a Qur'ānic fragment to one from Psalm 151, with references to a 'chant of Orpheus' for good measure.

⁷⁵⁸ Colpe, *Siegel*, 210. This conception, commonly thought to have come through Manichaeism, is ascribed ultimately to Ebionism (Stroumsa, 'Seal', 72 and 67 ff.). It is noteworthy that the term 'seal' (*khātam*) appears in a very specific Qur'ānic setting, in connection with the story of Zaynab b. Jaḥsh, and only later, under the Umayyads, was it to be elaborated in the sense of final confirmation (*TG*, 1.29).

⁷⁵⁹ De Blois, 'Naṣrānī', 16.

⁷⁶⁰ De Blois, 'Naṣrānī', 14; 'Elchasai', 41 f. Such a view was expressed earlier by Hirschberg, *Lehren*, 16.

term was not entirely novel, it having been used in the Syriac life of Simon the Stylite and as standard in Persian acts of martyrs, its use ascribed to al-Nu'mān, king of al-Ḥīra.⁷⁶¹ In all, the evidence is muddled, and the form in which Judaeo-Christian ideas and practices, especially prohibitions and regimes of purity and impurity, may have existed and circulated is indeterminate. All we are left with is an impression of miscellaneous syncretists,⁷⁶² very likely to have been local and marginal, who may very well have provided a number of mythemes and religious motifs to the vast, disparate world of Arabia.

The only inferences that can be made with some certainty concern the ideas of sects who denied the divinity of Christ and upheld all or part of Mosaic law, particularly with regard to circumcision and alimentary prohibitions,⁷⁶³ although such might be ascribed equally to Jews properly speaking and indeed to the Arabs themselves. One might mention the notion of continuous prophecy in which Muḥammad's mission, like that of Christ before him, was one of completion and definitive perfection,⁷⁶⁴ already mentioned in connection with Manichaeism. There are also possible echoes of the Baptist Mandaens (in the environs of al-Ḥīra) who are generally associated with Elkasaism. Of greater consistency is the belief that Christ was not crucified but that it was an *eidolon*, a simulacrum, of Christ that was in fact crucified. This doctrine is generally associated in scholarship with Docetism, but is more precisely to be associated with Julianist Aphthartodocetism (also called Phantasiast), a creed which could have made some headway from Ethiopia (by way of Egypt where Julian had sought refuge in 518) and al-Ḥīra into Najrān a century before Muḥammad's time.⁷⁶⁵ But again, it needs to be noted that this notion of the crucifixion is not so much identifiably Julianist or Docetic, or indicating adherence to these sects,⁷⁶⁶ as much as the deployment by the Qur'ān (Q, 4.157) of an idea, identified with Julian but not exclusive to him, in the context of anti-Jewish argument.

⁷⁶¹ Doran, *Lives*, 147. ⁷⁶² Cf. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 38.

⁷⁶³ Philonenko, 'Décret apostolique', 168 ff.; Roncaglia, 'Éléments', 104 ff.

⁷⁶⁴ Pines, *Jewish Christians*, 12.

⁷⁶⁵ On the uncertainties, turns and complexities attendant upon Julian's positions, Draguet, *Julien*, 181 ff.; Grégoire, 'Mahomet'; Samir, 'Theological Christian influence', 152 ff.; Swanson, 'Cross', 117; Goldstein and Stroumsa, 'Greek and Jewish origins', 430 ff.; Frend, *Monophysite Christianity*, 76 ff., 306 f.; Tardy, *Najrān*, 172 ff.; Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 373 f., 375 n. 182. Justinian's religious policy is thoroughly investigated by Menze (*Justinian*, 152 f., 222), who discusses the vagaries of non-Chalcedonian monks become Julianists, and the role of Theodora in supporting the dispatch of non-Chalcedonian bishops to Syria and Nubia.

⁷⁶⁶ Swanson, 'Cross', 117; van Reeth, 'Évangile', 165 f.

The existence of the tritheistic Kollyridian or Maryanist ideas, concerning belief in the theistic triad of God, Christ and Mary, condemned by the Council of Nicaea in 325, is attested in a letter of 569–570 from a number of monasteries, presumably in the Syrian desert and northern Arabia, to Jacob Baradeus.⁷⁶⁷ Its attestation by the Qur'ānic repudiation of this belief (Q, 4.170, 5.193–4),⁷⁶⁸ however, is shakier.⁷⁶⁹ Later Muslim tradition specifies this doctrine as being one propounded by 'Israelite Christians' (*al-Naṣāra al-'Isra'īliyya*), although it was sometimes attributed to all Christians.⁷⁷⁰ Finally, there are indications of a Jewish sect, or perhaps of an idea circulating among some Jews, which held Ezra to be a son of God, like Christ, and of the possible worship of Enoch as an angel with the characteristics of the Metatron.⁷⁷¹ But again, this cannot be taken simply for the garbled reading and faulty redaction of a misunderstood Biblical passage (4 Ezra 7.28).⁷⁷² The more sensible view would be to indicate that the matter is entirely unclear,⁷⁷³ and that it reflects the uncertain character of Jewish beliefs in Arabia in Late Antiquity, lending further sustenance to its non-Rabbinic character, and its animation by fragments of what are known as the Jewish Apocrypha.

In the final analysis, it appears that the fragments of early Christian provenance are of greater moment than the Jewish in the make-up of the Qur'ān and of Paleo-Islam.⁷⁷⁴ But, as indicated above, this consisted of doxological, motifemic and mythical fragments, whose incidence in the Qur'ānic text and in the emergent religion was not determinant.

Appendix: note on scholarship

For a survey of studies of Arab religions from the nineteenth century through to the 1960s: Henninger, 'Pre-Islamic Bedouin religion', and the literature there quoted. For a fairly comprehensive recent picture based on the range of available materials, see Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, ch. 6.

⁷⁶⁷ Fisher, *Between Empires*, 59.

⁷⁶⁸ Benko, *Virgin Goddess*, 170 ff., 192 ff.; Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 2.620 ff.; Hagemann and Pulsfort, *Maria*, 119 ff.; de Blois, 'Naṣrānī', 15.

⁷⁶⁹ Griffith ('Syriacisms', 100 ff.) argues convincingly that the Qur'ānic *thālith thalātha* (Q, 2.73) is not so much an expression of tritheism as a Syriacism derived from the emphatic ordinal *tlithāyā* applied to Jesus, conveying the sense of a threefold, not of three.

⁷⁷⁰ *SH*, 1.194; *MbS*, 1.494 f. – hence the faulty interpretation of *Naṣāra*, Christians properly so called, to mean Judaeo-Christians. See Griffith, *Church*, 7, for the more straightforward and sensible interpretation, and see 'Naṣāra', *EL*.

⁷⁷¹ Q, 9.30; *MbS*, 1.286; 2.167, 572; Newby, *Jews*, 59 ff. ⁷⁷² Künstlinger, 'Uzair', col. 382.

⁷⁷³ Sycz, *Ursprung*, 50. ⁷⁷⁴ Cf. Nöldeke, review of Wellhausen, *Reste*, 720 f.

The earliest comprehensive review was provided in the middle of the seventeenth century in Edward Pococke's discerning commentary on parts of the *History* of Abū'l-Faraj b. al-'Ibrī/Barhebraeus (d. 1286), which included probably all that there was to be known in Europe at the time (*Specimen Historiae*, 89 ff.). More than a century was to pass before this theme was revisited in synoptic compass, when Gibbon (*Decline and Fall*, 659 ff.)⁷⁷⁵ provided a particularly eloquent and crisp view of what was then thought to be known on the matter, depending in good measure on the work of Pococke (Pocock, *Barbarism*, 26 and 26 n. 25). Then came the detailed article of Ernst Osiander, a Protestant theologian, in 1853 ('Studien über die vorislamische Religion der Araber'), and a decade later a book by the Orientalist and Arabist Ludolf Krehl (*Religion der vorislamischen Araber*). Both were based on the limited amount of primary literary Arabic material available, with a slight attention to epigraphic sources, whose importance was only just beginning to be realised, with the rise of Assyriology, especially in Germany.

In line with a diffusionist history of religion, claims were made for the ubiquity of Mesopotamian influence and particularly the centrality to it of astralism, regarded almost as a perennial anthropological constant. On the main characteristics of this Pan-Babylonian line of historical investigation, important for the consideration of scholarship on ancient Arab religions, see Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 26 ff. Astralism as an overarching theme in this context in particular is emphasised in a critical discussion by Toy, 'Panbabylonianism', and also by Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 240. Both Osiander and Krehl proposed an astral substrate for Arab religions, an interpretation that is still persistent, and was perhaps most systematically expressed by Nielsen, *Handbuch*, 186–241. Note needs to be taken of a work virtually never cited. This is the very perceptive and comparative 1872 'culte payen' (published in lithograph) on the pagan Ka'ba by F. Lenormant, a polymath Assyriologist who was first to note the distinctiveness of Sumerian (which he called Akkadian). Though dated, it is still suggestive in part.

Much has been written on this topic since the late nineteenth century, but we still have no integrative statement on a par with Wellhausen's *Reste*, despite much detailed work and the wide-ranging investigations of Henning, Chelhod and others, and despite the best efforts of Fahd (*Panthéon* and *Divination*). Fahd's work attempted to assemble all available information, but has been adjudged to be uncritical in its use of sources,

⁷⁷⁵ For the full text: Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. D. Womersley, London, 1994, vol. III, ch. 50.

insufficiently familiar with the fundamental problematics, and still beholden to nineteenth-century *Völkerpsychologie*, with its use of Semitism as an explanatory grid: Rodinson, reviews of Fahd, *Panthéon* and *Divination* and Henninger, reviews of Fahd, *Panthéon* and *Divination*. 'Alī's extended treatment of polytheistic Arab divinities in his vast work on pre-Islamic Arabs (*al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.227–335 – the rest of this volume deals with other aspects of religion, including Christianity and Judaism) is a commendable effort to provide a comprehensive view, with a wider geographical remit than Fahd's, based on literary and epigraphic material available, not always used critically. Pan-Babylonian astralism is dominant in Arabic scholarship as well: for instance, al-Nu'aymī, *al-Uṣṭūra*, where Pan-Babylonian astralism comes to constitute a super-gloss of the rich material there assembled.

Most recently, the results of some archaeological and epigraphic work are being consolidated and published (Sachet (ed.), *Dieux et déesses*), albeit being in general more concerned with detail than with analysis of the material; attempts at a broad view (Robin, 'Matériaux',) are still very preliminary, but this type of research is likely to offer the most fruitful new departures.

Allāh

The second chapter above discussed the long process whereby, in Roman polity and over a period of centuries, a politically favoured and hence cultically central deity became the monotheistic God of empire. A not dissimilar process of cultic and political centralisation was successfully inaugurated in microcosm by Muḥammad in a very short period of time, according to local conditions, in a small corner of the Middle East.

It will be suggested in what follows that the emergence of Allāh and His promotion to indivisible primacy during the lifetime of Muḥammad and thereafter was largely an indigenous process that eventually utilised Biblical paradigms, in very complex ways, as conceptual and mythimetic schemata of scripturalist redaction which were nevertheless to remain fairly fragmentary and not altogether consistent during this period. In terms of religious history, I propose to call this period Paleo-Muslim, and its religion Paleo-Islam. In so doing, I will set aside perspectives that truncate and telescope this process by postulating that Allāh had already been duly worshipped and conceived as a transcendent creator, a cosmocrator and a pantocrator, or that He had been a divinity with exclusive prerogatives or a 'senior deity'. An analytical distinction between Allāh as an anthropological notion and Allāh as a later theological concept will be maintained throughout.

That Allāh became the monotheistic deity of Muslims has led almost invariably to the unwarranted assumption that He was always such a god. This assumption relayed classical Muslim imputation to the Arabs of Muḥammad's milieu clear, or at least latent, monotheistic tendencies and notions which, often but not always under the spell of some implicit notion of *Urmonotheismus*, led to supposing the seamless, unproblematic and almost natural emergence of Allāh to exclusive primacy.¹ This view

¹ For instance: Krone, *al-Lāt*, 215 ff., 229 ff.. That exaggerated claims are generally made for Allāh had already been noted by Wellhausen (*Reste*, 217) and, more recently and very clearly, by Pavlovich ('Qad kunna'). See the overview in 'Monotheismus', *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, 4.156 ff.

proposed a package connecting Mecca, Quraysh, Abraham and Allāh together into a supposedly coherent initial condition whose later development was a predictable and a foregone, almost a natural, consequence.

In scholarship where the emergence of Allāh was considered a Biblical borrowing, in a historiographic scheme of origins and influences, we witness equally the assumption that this Biblical deity was available as a comprehensive and integrated template of divinity, adapted unproblematically. Preference has generally been given to a treatment of this question in terms of the standard monotheistic construction of the history of religion, which supposes a coherent and rather simple linear tradition from a 'common background', with a marked preference for the textual over the cultic and anthropological, and leading somewhat self-evidently to the emergence of Muḥammad's deity.²

Yet on available evidence, however cacophonous, interpreted independently of later Muslim traditions and of assumptions of *Urmonotheismus*, the eventual elevation of Allāh from an occasional and vague presence to a specific personality and a cosmocratic concept is indeed astonishing, indeed revolutionary. What is immediately striking is how little a deity called Allāh had been in evidence in late antique Arabia and elsewhere; that no epigraphic evidence has been so far uncovered in the Ḥijāz c. 400–600 does not help.³ Arabic sources preserve materials, generally neglected in scholarship based upon the master narrative, that indicate explicitly the unfamiliarity of Ḥijāzis, including many of Muḥammad's companions, with Allāh.⁴ And although it is true that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, one needs to go further, and weigh matters on a balance of probabilities both historical and anthropological. In the case of Allāh, it is to my mind only possible to conclude that His eventual elevation to primacy had initially been improbable. A historically plausible model of interpreting available evidence will be offered which attempts to account for Allāh as a divine name that was, in the fullness of time, to become an

² For instance, Hawting, *Idolatry*, xii, 6. This view is further sustained by an argument against the persistence in the Ḥijāz of pagan archaism (29 ff.), and by discounting all such evidence of paganism in favour of claiming that the Qur'ān polemicised against Christians, not pagans, when it referred to the *mushrikūn*. Quite rightly holding the Qur'ān to have been underestimated as a historical source (Crone, 'How did Qur'anic pagans', 387), and taking Hawting's view as having been demonstrated beyond question, Crone ('Religion', 152, 154 ff.) then projects onto Muḥammad's adversaries the fully developed Qur'anic theology that he sought to make theirs, and that he polemically told them was his and theirs as well. On this, see also Neuwirth, *Koran*, 337 f., 337 n. 20.

³ The over-interpretation and misinterpretation of litanies of invocation offered to pagan deities has already been discussed in the previous chapter.

⁴ For instance, WAQ, 433, 479. The material is put together, with due conclusions drawn, by Pavlovich, 'Qad kunna', 55 ff.

object of worship and to take on the mythological and theological profile of an all-purpose divinity and of a sole deity.

Epigraphic material relating to religion consists largely of epithets and names. The question of nomenclature therefore becomes central to the first stage of investigating the genesis of the Paleo-Muslim Allāh. It is hoped that the discussion of nomenclature would be seen to correct the inordinate attention to philology and etymology employed in modern scholarship, and refocus the discussion on the history of Allāh as an anthropological and religious concept, within the limits necessarily imposed by the sources.⁵ This investigation might be seen to yield little by way of conclusive results. Yet such concrete results as do emerge will nevertheless clarify important details of the history that will be described, as this chapter tries to identify occurrences and contexts of a divinity called Allāh among the Arabs, and the significance of these occurrences.

This chapter will, concomitantly, go on to discuss the development of Paleo-Muslim divinity within the lifetime of Muḥammad and in the course of his prophetic career, based to a large extent on Qur'ānic documentation. It will also discuss this development in terms of what might be reconstructed of the agency that made possible the emergence of Allāh and the cultic means for His elevation to exclusive primacy. Based mainly upon the relative chronology of the Qur'ānic text, with references to themes discussed in chapter 4 and to other comparative material, this discussion will take up the emergence of Allāh to primacy and transcendence, in connection with notions of divinity and of the supernatural overall available to Muḥammad and his followers.

It will emerge that Paleo-Muslim divinity evolved, in sometimes discordant and inconsistent ways, from an Arabian noumen that was invited to inhabit the Meccan *ḥaram*. This process corresponded to the evolution of Muḥammad's profile from Meccan seer, Warner of his tribe (*nadhīr*), very common in the oldest Meccan *sūras*, to that of prophetic Apostle of God (*nabī*, *rasūl Allāh*),⁶ the former, *nabī*, not too dissimilar to the veterotestamental model, but also concordant with Warners such as the Cassandra-like Zarqā' al-Yamāma whose stories abound in Arabian traditions.⁷ It might be noted that, in a veterotestamental context, a *nabī* would have been sent by the deity to believers, a *rasūl* as an apostle to unbelievers, and

⁵ See the criticism of philological and etymological acrobatics in scholarship dealing with Azizos, Monimos, Arṣu, al-'Uzzā and Ruḍā in Macdonald, 'Goddesses, dancing girls', 4 ff.

⁶ For these terms, see Bijlefeld, 'Prophet', 1–28; Jeffery, *Qur'an as Scripture*, 28. Widengren (*Muḥammad*, 13) chose to highlight Manichaean parallels in the notion of a *nadhīr*.

⁷ Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, 5.441–7.

that Muḥammad fulfilled both roles, according to circumstances,⁸ with emphasis on the latter. The sole deity emerging was made possible conceptually by the structures of polytheism, involving syncretistic assimilation and henotheistic subordination. This movement corresponded, according to Usener's scheme, to the transition from *Vielnamigkeit* to *Allnamigkeit*, from the appellative to the proper name, from the opaque to the personal, from the generic to the specific in the tradition of Varro's *dei certi*.⁹

Ultimately, this development involved the promotion, by a political and social process, of one divinity to a position of exclusive dominance in the mundane and the divine realms, and to a position of transcendence and primacy that precludes reciprocity. This was accomplished ultimately by replacing the horizontal transference of names, functions, attributes and locations between gods, familiar in syncretism, with a vertical transference of epithets, locations and capacities, concentrated in the indivisible divine remit enjoyed by Allāh and his Meccan, later his cosmic, abode.

Nomenclature

The age-old polytheistic structure productive of henotheism and monolatry yielded the parameters of the situation in which a deity reclaimed the epithets and energies, including cultic energies, of other deities. In the case of Paleo-Islam, this development set in as the epithet and generic appellative *ʾil* lost its generic salience and gave way to the proper name Allāh, whatever the circumstances of the latter's provenance may have been.

We have seen that monotheism was made possible by the twin movements of cultic centralisation and ontological transcendence, subordinationist or otherwise, of the one divinity. In contrast to demons and other subaltern supernatural beings, which were generic and remained so, gods possessed cults. Cult individualises, and generally albeit not invariably calls for the naming of its object; in religions bereft of formally articulated theology, naming becomes 'der ganze Inhalt ihrer Offenbarung'.¹⁰ Naming a deity is the primal, elementary way of addressing the divine, one that restricts speaking to and of the divine to a series of exclamations, epicletic evocations and epithetic indications.¹¹ These yield primarily a function of

⁸ Radscheit, *Herausforderung*, 4.2.2.

⁹ Usener, *Götternamen*, 334 ff. and *passim*. See Bader, 'Gott nennen', 326 f., 339 and the scholarship there cited, and Gladigow, 'Gottesnamen', 1221 ff.

¹⁰ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 213, 148, 212 f.

¹¹ Bader, 'Gott nennen', 306 f., with reference to Usener's *Augenblicksgötter*.

indication.¹² Semantic motivation is largely absent except when a more elaborate, abstract and durable connection between word and referent is made in the medium of writing¹³ – in the case of Allāh, as of others, moments of scripturalisation and mythography.

It is therefore to naming in this world of deities which are functionally *Augenblicksgötter* that the discussion now turns, bearing in mind that what a name may or may not mean is irrelevant to its use as a name, or to godhood. The following discussion emerges in reaction to writing Paleo-Muslim religious history in the light of the dogmatic and genealogical concerns of classical Muslim scholarship. Initial conclusions may appear largely negative. But these negative conclusions are of salience to understanding the emergence of Muḥammad's religion, as, by clearing the decks, they unravel a number of unasked questions which, it is hoped, will lead to the historicisation of Paleo-Muslim beginnings and emergences.

It will be proposed that Allāh was not a cultic deity before Muḥammad, and that He was not the 'High God' of a pantheonic universe, but rather an opaque and obscure being, invoked on occasion, alongside other, more deeply rooted and locally enracinated deities. It will be proposed, further, that divine names as we have them do not lend themselves to reconstructing a conceptual configuration of divinity beyond cultic invocation, and that Allāh had no theological or mythographic profile, either locally or trans-locally, which might account for the way in which He ultimately crystallised in Paleo-Islam. Finally, it will be concluded that He evolved, decisively but not always smoothly, from a vaguely invoked name, perhaps onto a brief betylic stage, and finally to a transcendent, cosmogenic and cosmocratic deity during the lifetime of Muḥammad. This development is recorded in the Qur'ān, which bears testimony to a radical shift in politico-cultic authority involving agency.

Territorial lords

In a discussion of Arabic words that either went out of use with the advent of Islam, or were constrained to more restrictive denotation, al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 867) gave an account of the word *rabb*,¹⁴ pl. *arbāb*. This word, meaning simply

¹² Mainberger, *Kunst*, 117, who adds that what we have in such a situation of indication/naming is presentation rather than representation.

¹³ See Goody and Watt, 'Consequences', 29, 44.

¹⁴ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Hayawān*, 1.327 ff.; 'r-b-b', *LA*. It should be noted that Ba'l conveyed the same sense, but its use in Arabia, if at all securely attested, must have been very limited, albeit occurring in Q, 37.125. See 'b-'l', *LA*.

'lord', had hitherto been used to address superiors, through the whole range of seniority from *pater familias* to king, on to a deity, and denotes a superordinate in a very general way.¹⁵ It is not entirely inconceivable that the term *rabb* may have referred, in the form of *Rabb al-Ka'ba*, to Muḥammad, having been applied previously to his erstwhile protector al-Muṭ'im b. 'Adī, and quite possibly to Muḥammad's two immediate successors and to al-Muṭ'im's predecessors as well, in all cases in their capacity, unclear in detail and function, as socio-political guardians of the Meccan cult, and therefore of the cultic association involving the Ka'ba.¹⁶ How common this use may have been among the Arabs we cannot tell, but it does seem to be the case that the Ka'ba of Najrān was associated with three human *arbāb*, one at least, 'Abd al-Masiḥ b. Dāris b. 'Arabī b. Mu'ayqir, is reported to have set up that structure and to have superintended its activities.¹⁷

Rabb was a term routinely applied to divinities. The sublime presence residing in the betyl at the Meccan Ka'ba, for instance, was *rabb al-bayt* (Lord of the Dwelling). Among the Nabataeans, the cognate epithet *mr(') byt'* was used.¹⁸ The generic feminine epithet *al-rabba*, Lady/Mistress, designated Allāt of al-Ṭā'if. The Qur'ān contains numerous occurrences of the word *rabb* with a variety of pronominal suffixes,¹⁹ often in the vocative (Q, 19.10, 20.25, 25.30, 43.88 and *passim*). Used as a substantive with annexation,²⁰ *rabb* was used to designate Muḥammad's God²¹ – first as an unnamed deity of a location (Mecca) and the tutelary deity of Muḥammad himself. Later in the chronological order of the Qur'ān, *rabb* is often but not invariably identified as al-Raḥmān and as Allāh. This identification was a gloss on *rabb* by means of nomination, and ought not, without compelling reason, to be identified exclusively with the earlier, betylic *rabb al-bayt* of Q, 106.3 in the manner of later exegesis. In two Qur'ānic passages Allāh is

¹⁵ 'Rabb', in Arazi and Masalha, *Early Arab Poets*. Equivalents in other languages abound: *kyrios*, *dominus*, *mār*, *adōn*, with similar semantic extensions.

¹⁶ Al-Jāhiz, *al-Hayawān*, 1.329. Chabbi (*Seigneur*, 289 ff.) traces this in considerable detail. Ḥassān b. Thābit's famous elegy on al-Muṭ'im: *Dīwān*, lxxxviii.

¹⁷ On these *Arbāb*, a panegyric poem by al-A'shā, in *AGH*, 11.255, 12.8 and his *Dīwān*, 22. On 'Abd al-Masiḥ, *AGH*, 12.7.

¹⁸ Healey, *Religion*, 92. I owe this indication to Michael Macdonald, who also pointed out in a personal communication that *byt'* among the Nabataeans has also been interpreted as the royal house rather than that of the deity.

¹⁹ Some 900 times in the Qur'ān with reference to divinity, six times with reference to humans, the latter uniquely in the *sūra* of Joseph. A full table of these occurrences, in chronological order (according to Blachère's scheme and that of the Cairo Vulgate), coordinated with occurrences of Allāh, is provided in Chelhod, 'Rabb', 160 ff., noting (at 165) uncertainties of chronology. See also 'al-Kur'ān', *EL*, 5.402b–403a.

²⁰ Gaudefroy-Demombynes, 'Quelques noms', 4.

²¹ Pavlovich, 'Qad kunnā', 57, 61.

explicitly defined as 'my Lord' and 'my Lord and yours', the speakers being a believing Egyptian under Pharaoh, and Jesus (Q, 40.28, 43.64).

That the term *rabb*, for all its incidence, is never used in the Qur'ān to designate deities other than Muḥammad's is noteworthy, not least if one considers that *ilāh* (a god – pl. *āliha*), a word of considerably lower incidence in the Qur'ānic text, is used often to refer generically to the false gods of others, including Jesus and Mary (Q, 5.116, 16.51, 18.14, 20.88, 25.43, 25.68, 26.213). In such occurrences, *rabb* is used in the singular form. The plural form *arbāb* is somewhat derisively used to designate false deities and false lords, including angels, prophets and monks, in a small number of passages (Q, 3.64, 3.80, 9.31, 12.39). So also is *āliha*, as if use of the plural of a common noun to designate false gods only underlined the generic distinctiveness of the proper name Allāh, a proper name that might have had the generic qualifier *ilāh* but was in His exclusivity disengaged from the erstwhile supernatural realm of the *āliha*. Allāh had exclusive use of *rabb* as an epithet.

This use of *rabb* could be interpreted as reinforcing the exclusive use of Muḥammad's tutelary *rabb* as the generic term for a real as opposed to a false deity, and does indeed indicate that the generic appellation used for this particular *rabb* came to be used as a proper name, though never in the definite form *al-rabb*.²² In familiar syncretistic fashion, this particular *rabb* was identified with the henotheistic, monolatrous and later monotheistic Allāh in the various guises He was to acquire during the ministry of Muḥammad. Names count for a great deal, and involve utterances wherein reside the effects of nouminous powers which they evoke and conjure; the Qur'ān constantly enjoins believers to exclaim and glorify the Name of one's Lord (Q, 69.52, 73.8, 76.25, 87.1, 96.1, and *passim*). If the proper names Allāh/al-Raḥmān and Rabb came to be cognate as the former two emerged as the prime proper names of Muḥammad's God, this equivalence of names would need to be interpreted in terms of the equivalence of cultic practices offered to them,²³ centring in both cases around the noumen residing, or at least indexically represented, in the Black Stone of the Meccan Ka'ba.

There was no cultic equivalent to *al-rabb* involving the generic appellative *ilāh*, which is denotatively distinct from Allāh. As we shall see, it is likely to be the case that Allāh was used from very early on in Muḥammad's prophetic career, as a ready-made proper name integrally adopted, with no

²² Cf. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, 'Quelques noms', 4, and Chelhod, 'Rabb', 165 f.

²³ Cf. Décobert, 'Conversion', 53.

necessary relation to *ilāh* except for such as was generated by the retrospective morphological craft of grammarians. While Allāh will have had *ilāh* as a generic semantic marker pragmatically,²⁴ He acquired denotative distinction from other deities belonging to this category of *ālīha*, both by having a proper name and by having exclusive use of both the epithet of superordination (*rabb*) and the generic category of *ilāh*.

For the moment, as the question of nomenclature is considered, the 'nature' of deity will not be addressed, the assumption being that a variety of natures, functions and sacred domains might be assumed to be associated with any name. The ample divine polyonymy evident in the Qur'ān, as in earlier, more widely diffused pagan structures of religious life previously discussed, sustains this view. Proper names – grammatically, nouns – have been likened to iconic signs, having no semantic content when bereft of an interpretative code to decipher the name and establish its extension and pragmatic interpretation. The context, in all these cases, is all-important,²⁵ and it is these contexts that will be addressed in what follows as we consider how nouns become names, and names proper names.

What needs to be signalled in the present stage of the argument, therefore, is that we are dealing with the elementary form of Muḥammad's deity prior to its later connotative elaboration, and that this elementary form was one that was to persist throughout, alongside others. The proper name – Allāh, al-Raḥmān, Rabb al-Bayt, Rabb Muḥammad²⁶ – is in this respect to be conceived pragmatically, in its paralinguistic vocative and therefore cultic as distinct from functional aspect. This distinction would, in particular settings, yield the possibility of conceptual signification and elaboration,²⁷ mythographic and theological, and this possibility was fully developed in later Muslim theology, exegesis and dogmatics. As elsewhere in a pagan world, no specific predicates were, in the Meccan period of Muḥammad's career, attributable exclusively to a single deity; there were, rather, analogous or identical locutions applied to many.²⁸ We shall see in the course of this chapter that Allāh moved from the 'linguistically poor universe' of proper names²⁹ to denote divinity overall, a denotation whose object and referent were restricted to one specific being, and further on to the terminal stage of this development in which the proper name itself came to indicate the very concept of divinity.

²⁴ Cf. Fodor, *Semantics*, 146. ²⁵ Cf. Eco, *Semiotics*, § 2.9.2; Ullmann, *Semantics*, 122.

²⁶ Umayya b. Abī al-Salt (*Dīwān*, 79.1, 7, 8, 12) uses Rabb and al-Raḥmān interchangeably.

²⁷ Cf. Lyons, *Semantics*, § 7.5; Langer, *Philosophy*, 65 f.

²⁸ Cf. Caquot, 'Onomastique', 256. ²⁹ Eco, *Semiotics*, 87.

The elementary concept of divinity located at the corner of the Meccan Ka'ba, with the later cosmogenic and cosmocratic aspects of Allāh/al-Raḥmān bracketed out, is suggested by a number of Muslim traditions that seem to convey this concept most pregnantly. These traditions, transmitted through Abū Hurayra, Ibn 'Abbās and Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, clearly glossing, without metaphor, the myriad Qur'ānic references to the Hand of God (Allāh and al-Raḥmān), stated that the Black Stone was itself God's Hand.³⁰

This concrete and elementary designation for a deity immediately related to a place and an action, thereby acting functionally as an *Augenblicksgott*, but otherwise opaque and generic – in this instance, the unnamed Rabb, this generic namelessness itself becoming a name, later Allāh and al-Raḥmān – represents one terminus of the range of possibilities for the deployment of divine names. The other terminus is represented by the generic *ilāh* and other terms that are morphologically related to *'lh*. This range of possibilities has often given occasion to a fairly arbitrary construal of theologies from which Allāh supposedly derived. It is to this that we shall now turn.

Generic epithets and personal names

Like names associated with *'l*, mainly on the fringes of the Arabian steppe and outside it, *'lh* and its morphological correlates are fairly common in Semitic languages (except Ethiosemitic). In many cases, these were common nouns and generic signifiers to which were added attributes, qualifiers and other names, not infrequently proper names or toponyms, although the use of *'lh* and *lh* as proper names in cases where the reading is assured is extremely rare; *'lh* occurs, in Safaitic inscriptions for instance, just seven times in 28,000 texts, *lh* appearing twenty-four times.³¹

It seems reasonable to resist any imputation of a specific theology or mythography to the use of such names. There seems to be no justification for the assumption that some generic idea of a pantheon might be inferred from them, or that *'l*, *b'l* or other appellatives stand for a remote deity, father of others, ruler of the cosmos and of things invisible and visible,

³⁰ Al-Fāsi, *Shifā'*, 1.171 f. Anthropomorphic interpretations are not as far-fetched as might be generally assumed from later elaborations, as we shall see later. For God's hand, see, for instance, MbS, 1.269, 285; 3.163, 585, 653; 4.70, 247, 289, and the comment of Gilliot, 'Muqātil', 59. Most instructive in this regard is van Ess, *Youthful God*, 2 ff.

³¹ Michael Macdonald, personal communication. *Lt* and *'lt* occur respectively 835 and 86 times in the same repertoire of inscriptions – although it should be noted that most of these inscriptions are not of a religious character.

necessarily and invariably, and outside specifically indicated settings. Most of these divine epithets appearing in relevant inscriptions remain without specific cultic bearings that are known to us, and whatever theological, mythic or conceptual elaborations they may have had here and there are entirely lost. They seem to imply no concrete conceptions of a personal deity.³² Indeed, divine names, and the common nouns *ʾlh* and *ʾlt*, should be kept clearly distinct.³³ The divine name Allāh, whatever the details of its etymology, is distinct from *ʾlh*. In short, in itself, *ʾlh* appears not to have a specific lexemic value.

There are occurrences of derivatives of *ʾlh* and also, as indicated by Greek transliterations which aid attempts at vocalisation (as *-allas* or *-allos*), of the form Allāh in pagan Arab theophoric names throughout Arabia and its northern extensions.³⁴ None of this need imply an *ʾlh* cult, and less so the notion of an *ʾlh* cosmocrator and personal deity, or an *ʾlh*-governed assembly of deities. Moreover, *ʾlh* itself occurs as a personal name in theophoric compounds and on its own,³⁵ in tribal names (*bn ʾlh*),³⁶ and as a toponym at Samāwa in the Syrian steppe.³⁷

Once individualised in a location, a deity carrying the component *ʾlh* seems to part all but nominal and very broadly anthropological company with others carrying similar names.³⁸ As we have seen, there is one epigraphic occurrence of *ʾlh*, read as *Lāh, at Qaryat al-Fāw, mentioned together with 'Athtar and Kahl.³⁹ There are two occurrences of *lh* in Dadanitic, and some occurrence in Safaitic inscriptions of *h-ʾlh* as an epithet used as a divine name,⁴⁰ in addition to the *ʾlh* of al-Rawwāfa mentioned in the previous chapter. But these should be regarded as distinct from Allāh,⁴¹ which was used in the absolute form as a proper name

³² Cf. Caquot, 'Onomastique', 255, with regard to *B'l* and *Wdd*.

³³ Not dissimilarly, the Biblical *el elim* is 'god of the gods', whereas *el elohim* is 'God of the gods', the former related to *ʾl* and the latter to *ʾlh* (Daniel, 11.36, Ps. 50.1) – I owe this indication to Michael Macdonald.

³⁴ For instance, *RES*, nos. 2049, 2066, 2096 (the last an uncertain reading), and *passim*, derivatives from *-ʾlhy*, with the *y* being a *mater lectionis*: Haussig, *Götter und Mythen*, 422; Wuthnow, *Menschennamen, passim* (evidence here stems from Egypt); Bin Sarāy and al-Shāmīsī, *al-Muʾjam*, 33; Sourdél, *Cultes*, 88.

³⁵ Grimme, *Texte*, 141 f.; Michael Macdonald (personal communication) suggests the possibility that the free-standing *ʾlh* as a personal name may have been the hypocoristic of a theophoric compound, or composed from another root, such as *w-l-h*, common in Safaitic.

³⁶ Al-Aḥmad, *Mujtamaʿ*, 107. To this might be added *ʾlh* designated as a clan of *Rbt* in a Thamūdīc inscription in Jordan (Milik, 'Inscriptions', 58).

³⁷ Thilo, *Ortsnamen*, 60: *Ilāha* or *Lāha*. ³⁸ For a tally, see Beaucamp, 'Rawwafa', 1471 f.

³⁹ Al-Anṣārī, *Qaryat al-Fāw*, 21, photographic reproduction of the inscription at 146.

⁴⁰ Michael Macdonald, personal communication, after Jaussen-Savignac.

⁴¹ Thus it would appear unnecessary to translate, as if by default, the *h-lh* of a Dadanitic inscription at Jabal Ithlib near Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ as Allāh, as in JS, 1, no. 8.

throughout, as suggested by the cumulative evidence so far sketched and yet to come. Allāh does not appear to have grown out by extension from a theological conception specific to derivatives from *ʾlh*, nor is it necessary to infer that such must be somehow inherent in them.⁴²

Nor do theophoric names tell us much about the provenance or nature of a divinity.⁴³ One should clearly be wary of reading religious history and the history of the rise and fall of cultic deities from the patterns of names, theophoric or otherwise.⁴⁴ Curiously, there seems often to be an inverse proportion between invocations of a deity and the occurrence of its name in theophoric compounds in the same location.⁴⁵ All manner of social and historical associations are implied in theophoric names,⁴⁶ but they do not seem to be a reliable guide to religious observance. In South Arabia, there appears to be no onomastic attestation for *ʾlh*, yet *ʾlh* was generically used for gods in general, and, later, no theophoric constructions from *Rḥmnn* are in evidence, although *Rḥmnn* was the proper name of the monotheistic deity of Christians there and of henotheistic or monolatric deities.⁴⁷ Similarly, the occurrence of ‘Abd Allāh among late antique Arabs should not allow of over-interpretation.

Just as the question of what precisely a theophoric name betokened appears more complex than is generally held when considering religious history, so also does the very wide occurrence of derivatives of *ʾlh* in cultic and votive inscriptions and in performative statements such as invocations, supplications and oaths. *ʾlh* and its morphological correlates do not appear to be very frequently attested in ancient Arabic poetry, but it is nevertheless documented sporadically.⁴⁸ Its geographical and linguistic scope spanned the entire region between south Arabia, as we have just seen, and northern Mesopotamia, where the Edessene Sin was designated as *ʾlh* and as *Māralāha*, chief *ʾlh*.⁴⁹ At Zabad, some 60 km south-east of Aleppo, an

⁴² Similarly, Bottéro (*Mésopotamie*, 381) notes that the generic denominations of divine beings in Mesopotamia (*dingir* in Sumerian and *ilum*, pl. *ilū* in Akkadian), designated by the same cuneiform sign, are not analysable to known semantic elements or to radicals.

⁴³ Grimme (*Texte*, 147 ff.) attempted to extract a fragmentary north Arabian theology from theophoric names.

⁴⁴ As for instance in Krone, *al-Lāt*, 208 f., 284, and Winnett, ‘Daughters’, 117.

⁴⁵ In Safaitic inscriptions, it may be recalled, there are twenty-four examples in 28,000 texts of invocation of *Lh*, whereas theophoric names with this element are very abundant.

⁴⁶ Cf. Sawyer, *Sacred Languages*, 119.

⁴⁷ Robin, ‘Graffites islamiques’, 189 f.; ‘Religions païens’, 62.

⁴⁸ Poems by al-Nābigħa al-Dhubayānī: ‘Ilāh’ in Arazī and Masalha, *Early Arab Poets*, q.v.; Umayya b. Abī al-Salt, *Dīwān*, 10.36; 11.13, 21.

⁴⁹ Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, s.v. ‘Allāh’; Wyatt, ‘Understanding polytheism’, 42 and 42 n. 38; Drijvers and Healey, *Syriac Inscriptions*, D13, 17 and *passim*.

important bilingual Greek/Aramaic inscription with a later Arabic subscription on the lintel of a church dated AD 512 invokes the succour of ʾl-ʾlh, 'the God', a common epithet for named divinities, here uniquely with the Arabic definite article *al-*, to which we shall return below.⁵⁰ In pagan Palmyra, there is evidence of ʾlhy, read as *Ilahay, used in the usual way to designate a variety of deities and represented by an iconography not unlike that of the martial protector deities ʾAzīzu and Arṣu.⁵¹

The use of *Ilahay in any but a generic way and as a common noun is to be doubted; the Qurʾānic counterpart for this in the use of *ilāh* has already been indicated. There seems to be no justification for deriving a personal notion of ʾl/ʾlhy, or for reading it as Allāh by default translation, or for assuming that there was a cult to deities who bore this as a proper name rather than as a generic appellative and an epithet.⁵²

The nomenclature surveyed so far conveys little detail about religion. It indicates a number of onomastic conventions of attribution, although common nouns can, if and when extra material is available, acquire lexemic values, however vague. These names can only acquire historical and anthropological salience when attached to specific locations and groups: trans-local names do not of necessity imply identical trans-local deities, as suggested in the previous chapter. This was already noted by Wellhausen when, assuming that Allāh was widely worshipped, he asserted that He was in some ways many local deities sharing a name.⁵³ This view is far more consonant with our state of knowledge, and more plausible in terms of historical anthropology, than the rather common assumption that different names might be epiphanies of a unique deity.⁵⁴

Summarily building upon results obtained so far, it may safely be concluded for the moment that, when Allāh first appeared in the Meccan period of Muḥammad's career, and indeed when al-Raḥmān first appeared at more or less the same time, if slightly earlier, they appeared precisely in the

⁵⁰ RCEA, § 2. An excellent photograph of this inscription, important for the study of the rise of Arabic and Arabic script (first noted by Sachau, 'Arabische Inschrift', 189), is given in Grohmann, *Paläographie*, 2, Tafel 11.1, 2 and p. 16. On uncertainties and differences over the reading of this inscription, see Sachau, 'Trilinguis' and, later, Kugener, 'Nouvelle note', 583, confirming the reading of Littmann, 'Osservazioni', 196 ff., revised and amended by Robin, 'Réforme', 331 f., 337. The not too dissimilar South Arabian ʾln is, however, a calque of Elohim (Robin, 'Ḥimyar et Israël', 843).

⁵¹ Starcky, 'Relief palmyrénien', 371, 376. *Nhy* has been interpreted as the alternate of *lhy* according to the l/n alternance known in Nabataean: Starcky, 'Relief palmyrénien', 377 – the *y* is a *mater lectionis*.

⁵² For instance, Krone, *al-Lāt*, 463, 481 f.; Littmann, *Nabatean Inscriptions*, no. 71 (with the caveat that the reading is uncertain), and *Arabic Inscriptions*, no. 1 (with the assertion that the reading is certain); Winnett *et al.*, *Ancient Records*, no. 14; Starcky, 'Relief palmyrénien', 378. Still less does there seem to be any reason to read the Safaitic *hl* [*h*] and the reconstructed [*ʾl*] as Allāh, as in Littmann, *Safaitic Inscriptions*, nos. 236, 243.

⁵³ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 217. ⁵⁴ As for instance in Fahd, *Panthéon*, 255.

generic aspect of the local *rabb*. He was the tutelary deity of Muḥammad and the noumen brought into association with the Black Stone in the south-western corner of the Meccan Ka'ba, not the Allāh of what in the fullness of time was to become Islam.

Apart from the Zabad inscription, where the definite article *al-* precedes a generic epithet, and the occurrence of **al-Lāh* at Qaryat al-Fāw, the only attested cultic presence of a form of *'lh* accompanied by a definite article is the Safaitic *hlh*, which is distinct from occurrences of *h-'lh*. This *hlh* has been read as **hallāh*, and various scholars have often, without reason, seen **hallāh* in various inscriptions. They have taken it to be a specific form of Allāh, using the definite article *ha*, appearing in Dadanatic, Safaitic and Thamūdīc inscriptions alongside other deities, **Dhū Ghābat* (the deity of a location thought to be not far from Medina),⁵⁵ **Lāt*, and **han-'Uzzāy*, in the region of Madā'in Ṣālih and al-'Ulā in north-west Arabia, with occurrences from around the fifth century BC up till the early fourth century AD.⁵⁶

But this Safaitic *hlh* occurs once only, in an invocation together of *lt* and other divinities, to grant relief and inflict lameness and blindness on whoever defaced the inscription. Although a number of interpretations might be offered for the *h* set before *lh*, including the possible omission of certain graphic signs in the alphabetic strokes, it is nevertheless plausible to take *hlh* for a genuine divine name formed from *h-'lh* by the assimilation of the initial *l'* in the author's dialect.⁵⁷

That there is also a possible mention in North Arabian inscriptions on an altar, *msgd*, built in the 'House of *Hlh* who dwells in *Mspt*', an obscure location,⁵⁸ goes some way to indicate that this was a deity, whatever His or Her name may have been, dwelling in a particular location, the deity of a place, very likely residing in a betyl, but also possibly in an idol such as those whose debris was excavated at al-Khurayba.⁵⁹ Uncertainties of reading apart, what this would indicate is that compound forms of *'lh* could, at different times and places, act as both a generic notion and a common noun, adjoined to a proper name specified regionally or with

⁵⁵ Ryckmans, *Religions arabes*, p. 19.

⁵⁶ Winnett, *Safaitic Inscriptions*, nos. 279, 284 and 'Allah before Islam', 246 ff.; Krone, *al-Lāt*, 458 ff., 465 f.

⁵⁷ In any case, there seems to be no way of telling how *hlh* was in fact vocalised. On the assumption that it may have been a contraction of *h-'lh*, one might reconstruct it as **Haylāh*, on an analogy with the vocative particle *h* preceding *'lt*, and the common elision of the medial *a*, producing the form *hylt*. I owe these specifications to Michael Macdonald (personal communication).

⁵⁸ *Hlh* according to the most uncertain and unlikely reading of Littmann, *Nabatean Inscriptions*, no. 96 (an inscription from Sahwat al-Khiḍr in Ḥawrān dated not later than AD 123/4) – I owe this point to Michael Macdonald (personal communication).

⁵⁹ Ryckmans, *Religions arabes*, 19 f.; 'Liḥyān', *EL*.

certain qualifiers, including syncretistic qualifiers. There is no reason to suppose that Allāh, when He made his appearance in Mecca, was much different.⁶⁰

And even if we bracket for the moment the centuries and geographical distances that separated Muḥammad's Allāh from the Safaitic *hlh* and the various invocations of *lh* and *hlh*, one must also take into account that Allāh, *lh* and *hlh* ought not to be regarded as cognate, or to be an identical or a homonymous deity. Arabian deities of the time and place under consideration were, as repeatedly indicated, decidedly local, in the absence of an overarching political or priestly instance that might have given sustainable form and conceptual and cultic uniformity to the distribution pattern of religious geography.

It has long been realised that the occurrences of *lh* between the Ḥijāz and southern Syria, which often included a place determinant in epigraphic evidence, do not necessarily denote the Qur'ānic Allāh, despite the possibility of Allāh as a pronunciation, at least so in theophoric names as might be ascertained from Greek transliteration.⁶¹ This would also apply irrespective of the fact that, as *a* was never written in the inscriptions that have been discussed, and nor were consonants emphasised by graphic doubling, what appears in inscriptions as *lh* may well have been vocalised as *Allāh.⁶² What can be concluded is that it is not improbable that deities whose epithets or names were related to *lh* were worshipped, with cultic arrangements and quite possibly with stelae, idols and altars, between northern Ḥijāz and southern Syria around the turn of the millennium and for two centuries subsequently. On present evidence, more than this cannot be said with assurance.

Hllh and Allāh may therefore indeed have been proper names on occasion. But a proper name, the simplest kind of symbol and unlike the common noun, has not in itself a specific connotation or semantic motivation. It may be quite arbitrarily applied, and may also be liable, with socio-linguistic deliberation, to connote a very general sort of conceptual meaning. A name in itself has reference, but not, of necessity, sense. It cannot be used predicatively except, again, with deliberation, as it moves between being a proper name and a common noun.⁶³ The occasional and fragmentary deity named Allāh is no exception to this. The move from sheer nominal designation with rather elementary qualification, to greater semantic motivation and conceptual connotation, was, as we shall see,

⁶⁰ *Contra*, for instance, Krone, *al-Lāt*, 467 f., 475 ff.

⁶¹ See note 34 above and Grimme, *Texte*, 133 and 133 n. 1. ⁶² Cf. Robin, 'Réforme', 339.

⁶³ Langer, *Philosophy*, 65 f.; Lyons, *Semantics*, §§ 6.3, 7.1, 7.5; Ullmann, *Semantics*, 77 f.

made on behalf of his divinity by Muḥammad, as is evident in the historical flow of the Qurʾān, with the movement and interaction between what might be regarded as its Rabbanist, Raḥmānist and Allāhist pericopes.⁶⁴

Allāh and other supernatural beings

Before this matter is dealt with, two topics relating to nomenclature still need to be discussed briefly. One relates to the inhabitants of the world of Arab divinities. The other deals with the divine name Allāh itself, and with the issue of why it may have been attractive to Paleo-Muslims.

The divine world of the pagan Arabs of the steppe and desert was not only inhabited by noumena referred to as *rabb* and *ilāh*. As we have seen, it was also populated by preternatural beings that were in most instances bereft of proper names, generically called the *jinn*. These 'would make very passable gods' had they had articulated and durable circles of worshippers,⁶⁵ with the capacity to institute cult. In other words, the difference between a deity and a demon is that in contrast to the generic and fleeting nature of the latter, the former possesses a cult and can have a proper name.⁶⁶

Yet there is an elementary anthropological affinity between the two. Anxious travellers in remote spots are reported to have invoked the Lord of the location for overnight succour (*ʿawdh*, *ʿiyādh*),⁶⁷ as one would have invoked the protection of the deity of a sanctuary, or of the human Rabb of an encampment – the lord of the place often being called *ʿAzīz*, connoting inviolability and unassailability (*ʿAzīz ḥādhā al-wādī*). This latter was quite a common qualifier for divinities throughout the steppe and the desert over more than a millennium.⁶⁸ This formula of propitiation later became an invocation for protection, *ʿiyādh*, by the Rabb of Muḥammad.⁶⁹

Yet *jinni* and *ilāh*, *gny* and *ʿlh*, were often, not surprisingly, synonymous. This was particularly so in areas to the north of the Ḥijāz, in the Palmyrene, in Baalbek, on the northern and central Syrian coast,⁷⁰ but

⁶⁴ I first put forward this proposition of Qurʾānic pericopes in *Rom*, 44 f. A first step was taken by Jomier, 'Divine name'. It has been suggested (Chelhod, 'Rabb', 167) that, assuming a transition within the Qurʾān between uses of Rabb and Allāh, this matter might be helpful in clarifying matters of Qurʾānic chronology.

⁶⁵ Robertson Smith, *Religion*, 121. ⁶⁶ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 213.

⁶⁷ These terms were also involved in the names of talismans. The term also occurs in a Safaitic inscription – Michael Macdonald, personal communication quoting Winnett and Harding, *Inscriptions from Fifty Safaitic Cairns*, Toronto, 1978, no. 390.

⁶⁸ The mention by classical Muslim sources of *sayyid*, Master, instead of *ʿAzīz* or Rabb may well be pious substitutions and interpolations: *SH*, nos. 119, 121.

⁶⁹ *SH*, 1.295.

⁷⁰ Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs*, 161; Dussaud, *Pénétration*, 110 ff.; Schlumberger, 'Prétendu dieu', 209 ff., 222; Starcky, 'Relief de Palmyrène', 329 f., 330 n. 16.; Starcky, 'Relief dédié au dieu Mun'im', 59.

seems absent from Nabataean territories.⁷¹ However, it does seem to be yielded up by the elementary structures of polytheism, and represents a case in point for the argument here sustained concerning tutelary deities and local inhabitation.⁷² It may help resolve the question of the anonymous god among the Arabs.⁷³ It is in keeping with the initially undifferentiated use by the Greeks of *daimon* and *theos*; the former term acquired negative connotations only with Christianity and its reorganisation of the economy and taxonomy of the supernatural;⁷⁴ we shall discuss later a similar process in the Qur'ān.

Closer to the Hijāz, the generic (and Qur'ānic) name *ml'k*, later *malak*, generally translated as angel,⁷⁵ appears in the form *mlk* on Thamūdīc inscriptions, as an object of supplication.⁷⁶ Angels, not uncommon in the epigraphic record,⁷⁷ were described as capable of flight,⁷⁸ as were the *jinn*. Earlier Qur'ānic uses of the term (Q, 69.17, 89.22) may very well fit into this picture of indeterminacy and mutual convertibility in the taxonomy of the supernatural. A clear-minded medieval exegete has already ventured to suggest that the *jinn* and the angels belonged to the same species,⁷⁹ and, albeit with some categorical confusion, the view was imputed by an early exegete to a number of pagan Arab groups (Juhayna, B. Salmā, Khuzā'a), that the *jinn* were one particular group of angels (*malā'ika*).⁸⁰ The same man qualified *malā'ika* as belonging to the class of *ālīha*, the plural form of *ilāh*.⁸¹ Clearly, what we have here is an indeterminacy and inconstancy of nomenclature and classification for supernatural beings, reflecting categorical indeterminacy and a shared divine nature, and enabling ideas of transfiguration and transfiguration, also possibly reflecting particularistic usages. The Qur'ān (Q, 6.100) asserts that some, presumably some Arabs, associate the *jinn* with divinity, as false gods.⁸² We shall see later

⁷¹ Healey, *Religion*, 143. ⁷² Cf. Hoyland, *Arabia*, 140 f.

⁷³ Dijkstra, *Life and Loyalty*, 293 f., and cf. Bikerman, 'Anonymous gods', *passim*.

⁷⁴ 'Dämon', *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, 2.204; Colpe, 'Geister', 546 f., 688 ff.

⁷⁵ On which see Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 269 f. Arab linguists differed on whether *malak* or *mal'ak* was the 'original' form of the word: 'm-l-k', LA and Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishtiqāq*, 26. Crone ('Angels') discusses some pertinent issues usefully, but ultimately hovers over this ground, favouring a discussion of texts and 'theological landscapes' over one of a more ethnographic nature.

⁷⁶ Al-Dhiyib, *Nuquṣ Thamūdiyya min Jubba*, no. NQ46; Ryckmans, *Religions arabes*, 21, contrary to Ryckmans' interpretation of this term in association with the Biblical Moloch. The reading *mlk* is not secure.

⁷⁷ Moubarac, 'Noms', 349. See al-Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, 1.152.

⁷⁸ *Al-Mufaddaliyyāt*, 119.26 ('Alqamah b. 'Abadah b. al-Nu'mān, d. c. 600).

⁷⁹ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, ad Q, 37.158. See 'Zwischenwesen', *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, 5.414 ff.

⁸⁰ MbS, 1.581. ⁸¹ MbS, 4.16. ⁸² Cf. Bell, *Commentary*, 1.200.

that this persisted in some sections of the Qur'ān as it groped towards a reconfiguration of supernatural taxonomy in favour of Muḥammad's deity.

In this world of noumena without constant classificatory order, Allāh appears clearly as a floating signifier. He was clearly not the 'common denominator' of all divinities⁸³ (this would have been *'lh, gny, ml'k*), regardless of His name which, it seems, was all that there was to characterise Him initially in the time and place relevant to the emergence of Paleo-Muslim divinity. He could have been designated as any of the above generic uncanny and sublime beings; the distinctions between which, and between them and Allāh, were not as yet either clear or relevant. The name Allāh never had the generic sense of a deity; once it became the name of the exclusive monotheistic divinity, the category of deities was dissolved as it was appropriated exclusively by Allāh. In the Qur'ān, which bears marked traces of Arab paganism, we find that Allāh is qualified by the term al-Raḥmān and is often cognate with this name, but al-Raḥmān also figures as Allāh's predicate. Yet the name al-Raḥmān, though ultimately cognate with Allāh, is never qualified by Allāh's name, although it does, like Allāh, have Rabb as a predicate.

For all its slight incidence in ancient Arabic poetry, on the assumption of integrity and despite the possibility of interpolation,⁸⁴ we have seen that Allāh had no significant or durable cult among the late antique Arabs of the Ḥijāz or elsewhere, but was, as we shall see, invited to inhabit the Meccan Ka'ba during the ministry of Muḥammad. What needs to be retained for the purposes of the argument to come is to note that the uses of Allāh in Arabic poetry were generally confined to oaths and curses,⁸⁵ with little connection with His profile as it emerged later, conforming rather to the profile of an *Augenblicksgott* whose presence starts and ends with the utterance of his name at the moment required.

Allāh: etymology, genealogy and self-reference

As we move from negative conclusions to research problems brought about by them, it is now appropriate to look briefly into the character and provenance of the divine name Allāh in order to wind up the above

⁸³ Fahd, *Panthéon*, 253.

⁸⁴ For instance, Lyall, *Translations*, xxvii. For examples of this occurrence, almost at random: al-A'shā, *Dīwān*, 17.4; *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, 30.5, 11 ('Abd Yaghūth b. Waqqāṣ al-Ḥārithī, fl. c. 584); Qays b. al-Khaṭīm, *Dīwān*, 5.6, 14; 6.22; 11.8; 14.12; the *mu'allaqāt* of Zuhayr, 'Abid b. al-Abrāṣ and al-Ḥārith b. Ḥilliza respectively in al-Tabrīzī, *Sharḥ*, 27 f., 19 f., 75; al-Nābigha al-Dhubayānī, *Dīwān*, 4.8 f., 21.21.

⁸⁵ Caskel, *Schicksal*, 54.

considerations from epigraphy and linguistics. Morphologically, it is clear that Allāh is related to the Semitic *ʾlh*, of which it is an amplified form.⁸⁶ Whether or not a morphological treatment based upon the standard stem and pattern model common in Semitic philology overall can be an appropriate guide to semantic pragmatics and historical linguistics in general is not a matter that I can elaborate here, but it is doubtful. This model appears not to be a description of actual, historical word formation, the stem being a morphological artefact rather than a linguistic reality, reflecting the rationalisation of language, pedagogical and systematising habits and the consequences of consonantal script, and in effect morphemes rather than roots.⁸⁷

Following an opinion common among Arab grammarians, Allāh has generally been taken to be a syncope of *al-ʾlāh* by a haplogy, with the suppression of the *hamza* according to a regular pattern in Arabic nominal terms (*ʾlh* < *ilāh* < *al-ilāh* < Allāh),⁸⁸ although the degree of regularity of this rule has been disputed.⁸⁹ There seems to be a measure of contrivance in the labour of classical Arab linguists who devoted attention to this matter. There is a theological assumption behind it, that of the existence of a monotheistic motif explaining the exclusive denomination of a deity by a definite article. Moreover, some preferred to see Allāh generated from *ʾlāh*, others from *lāh*.⁹⁰ This said, it must also be stated that this view is technically satisfactory and presents no serious phonetic difficulties.

The trouble with such morphological genealogies is that they privilege etymologies and pseudoetymologies of supposedly ultimate origin and initial condition (what Arabic grammarians and lexicographers termed *wadʿ*) over a more historical pursuit of realised semantic fields and of pragmatics.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Thus, not, as suggested by Moubarac ('Noms', 98 f.), from *ʾl* and the morphologically related *Ilān, *Ilahay, *Ilāt and others.

⁸⁷ See in particular Larcher, 'Racine', 94 ff., which includes an account of the traditional view of the root and schema; Larcher, 'Où il est montré', *passim*; Porkhomovsky, 'Structure', 46; Touratier, 'Racine', 93, 95. *LA* contains words related to 6,538 trilateral, 2,458 quadrilateral and 187 quinilateral roots, a total of 9,183 (R. Baalbaki, personal communication).

⁸⁸ Sibawayh, *al-Kitāb*, 2.195 f., drawing an analogy with *unās* < *al-unās* < *al-nās*. See Fleisch, *Traité*, § 30h.

⁸⁹ Winnett, 'Allah before Islam', 247.

⁹⁰ '-l-h', *LA*; al-Rāzi, *Tafsīr*, 1.87 ff.; Gimaret, *Noms divins*, 121 ff. For Allāt: Krone, *al-Lāt*, 43 ff. For a review of the morphology of Allāh and other divine names in the Qurʾān according to Arabic grammarians, see al-Zajjāji, *Ishṭiqāq*.

⁹¹ On the root fallacy of Biblical vocabulary and associated themes, see Barr, *Biblical Language*, 107 ff.; in briefer compass but with succinct focus, Sawyer, *Sacred Languages*, 116, and the works there cited. Wellhausen had already expressed his reserve about such etymological procedures, and insisted on a distinction between basic meaning and linguistic usage: Rudolph, 'Wellhausen', 113.

They tend to draw semantic conclusions from morphological connections incautiously and to substitute morphology for history. In this sense, the evasion of historical, semantic and socio-linguistic approaches to the matter would amount to a somewhat incurious *lectio faciliior*. Ultimately, grammarians and philologists wanted to bring systematic order to the Arabic lexicon, not to write history, and in this they have been suggestively compared to genealogists.⁹²

By contrast, paralinguistic and non-morphological considerations would indicate a number of more pertinent matters. We have seen that Allāh as such was vocalised as the theophoric element in a variety of personal names, spread widely. One might also note that Allāt, or rather 'lt, to which the Arabic definite article is almost invariably imputed, is a name not epigraphically attested in this form. She was an ubiquitous deity, worshipped very far beyond territories where the definite article *al-* was in use, and very long before there is any evidence for the use of this article.

Moreover, on the common assumption of the presence of a definite article, the Dadanitic *hlh* and Thamūdīc *h'lh* should in fact have been **ha-Lāh*, or **han-'Ilāh*,⁹³ not *ha-* or **han-Allāh*, and clearly not Allāh. In the context of compounds from 'lh in Arabic, one might also consider Arabic forms of jurative invocation, not very ample but common enough, that use *lāh* as their nominal element, but without the velarised or emphatic *l* of Allāh, such as *tal-Lāh*, *lil-Lāh* and (more commonly) *bil-Lāh*. The elements *ta*, *bi* and *li* function grammatically as prepositions, and all these expressions are formulaic ellipses excluding *uqsimu* ('I swear') and similar enunciatory formulae.⁹⁴ In all these cases, Arabic grammar detected a contracted Allāh component, although these jurative invocations actually have the form of *ta-llāh* (used several times in the Qur'ān) and *bi-llāh*, with *hamzat al-waṣl* omitted. These expressions are not derived from Lāh preceded by a preposition. One possible conclusion that might be drawn from the foregoing is that the *ha* element in Ancient North Arabian may well in these cases have been a prefixed vocative particle, a phenomenon which is attested.⁹⁵ Transposing this into the suggestion that the *al-* in Allāh may be a vocative particle is attractive, but it would seem to be unique to Allāh, as there is no incidence elsewhere in Arabic of its use as a vocative particle, although *h>*' is not uncommon in Arabic.

⁹² Al-Ṣuwayyān, 'al-Badāwa', 84.

⁹³ The definite article in Dadanitic changes from *h-* to *hm-* only before glottals and pharyngeals: Macdonald, 'Ancient North Arabian', 517 f.

⁹⁴ Cf. Fleisch, *Traité*, § 151g, and see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.572.

⁹⁵ 'h', *LA*; Macdonald, 'Ancient North Arabian', 519.

Whatever conclusion may or may not be drawn from this, it is likely that, in terms of its history, the form *Allāh* was not so much a morphological derivation from *ilāh* or *lāh*, as integrally primary, a name adopted in its absolute form without regard to morphology, or the underlying theological assumption of definitiveness and exclusivity added to divinity in general by the addition of the definite article. This is a matter also highlighted in Arabic grammar, where the *al-* element was seen also to be integral to the word's structure, and not used as a mark of definitiveness, although this seems largely to have been part of the apologetic argument that the supreme name of God cannot be indefinite.⁹⁶ The historical implausibility of the morphological hypothesis discussed is further sustained by the fact that the addition of the definite article *al-* to *Lāh* or *Īlāh* would yield different but allophonic values for the medial vowel /a/ (Ē and *a* respectively, according to international phonetic notation). This is at least the case with their enunciation according to standard Qur'ānic modes of cantillation.⁹⁷

This brings us to the further and related matter of *tafkhīm*, emphasis by velarisation of the phoneme /l/ in *Allāh* which, like definitiveness, has been regarded in classical Arabic philology and much modern scholarship alike as arising from moral enhancement and tonal emphasis, without adequate attention to its grounding in Arabic phonetics and historical linguistics.⁹⁸

The peculiar phonetic character of Allāh would invite consideration of its provenance, in so far as this might be ascertainable. It has been proposed that Allāh came from the Aramaic in the absolute state Alāhā, as a proper name, duly Arabised by dropping the determinative affix *ā*.⁹⁹ But the fact

⁹⁶ Sibawayh, *al-Kitāb*, 2.195 f.; Khan, *Exegetischen Teile*, 112; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 1.103; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.543. See the discussion of the related questions of definitiveness in proper and common names in Ibn al-Anbārī, *al-Inṣāf*, no. 101, and of *al-* in Ibn Hishām, *Mughnī*, 50 f.

⁹⁷ For phonetic and related technical aspects of *tilāwa*, *tartīl* and *tajwīd*, see EQ, 4.373 ff.

⁹⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.543, and the comments of Ambros, 'Entstehung', 24. The velarised /ll/ in Allāh appears irregular and *sui generis* (Ambros, 'Entstehung', 23, 27), and the only rule that might be formulated would be that the phoneme /l/ has the allophone [ll] in the sequence /-llāh/ when it is not preceded by /i/ and when it means God: Ferguson, 'Emphatic l', § 2. Further, unlike others (/t/, /d/, /s/ and /ḍ/) ('Velarization', *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, 4.636–8), the velarised /ll/ is not an independent letter of the Arabic alphabet. It appears when the word occurs in the nominative case, but not the genitive. Regardless of whether the velarised /ll/ should be regarded as an allophone or an independent phoneme, this is an unusual phenomenon in which a phoneme is of such rare occurrence in the total lexicon of the Arabic language, yet appears in one particular morpheme which occurs very frequently; this phenomenon is not altogether unknown in other languages: Ferguson, 'Emphatic l', § 2, where the author cites a similar phenomenon respecting the phonetic value ð in English (as the *th* in *this*) which occurs, of course, in many more morphemes.

⁹⁹ Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 66 f.; Winnett, 'Daughters', 122; Trimmingham, *Christianity*, 251 n. 14; Nau, *Arabes chrétiens*, 26 n. 2, who concludes unnecessarily from this that the origin of Muḥammad's Allāh is Christian.

is that there is no trace of Allāhā in Syriac, only of Alāha,¹⁰⁰ bearing in mind that the doubling of consonants is not unknown to Syriac but is not indicated graphically. We need to bear in mind the fact that we are here discussing Allāh, which is phonetically distinct from al-Lāh, if only because of velarisation in the former and its lack in the latter. If anything, the point was made that the Syriac form might have been derived from the Arabic,¹⁰¹ with a tendency in late sixth- and early seventh-century Syriac towards the emphatic articulation of the /a/, giving it a tonal colour comparable to the Arabic *ā* in contact position with velarised consonants.¹⁰² In all, the matter of the relationship between Arabic and Syriac in this regard needs to be adjudged inconclusive, but must also bear consideration in terms of the possibility that this divine name with velarisation, *tafkhīm*, might have been yielded by the contact area of Syriac and Arabic in northern Ḥijāz (and earlier in al-Ḥīra as well), taking into account also the possibility of a velarisation in the Ḥijāzi dialect. In all probability, therefore, the two names Allāh and Alāha seem to have emerged independently. But the matter cannot end here, as much of this consideration has hitherto considered the distant Syriac, and paid far less attention to the more proximate Nabataean Aramaic.

One could regard emphasis to have been a prosodic feature connected with Muḥammad's preaching, or indeed, if one accepted that Allāh had been used by the Arabs, the possibility that emphatic articulation was brought in by Muḥammad as a mark of acoustic differentiation from previous uses of this divine name.¹⁰³ Finally, it has been suggested that with respect to the syncopation discussed above,¹⁰⁴ with its loss of the stem-initial syllable *i* of *ilāh* in conjunction with the definite article, one might hypothesise that this, though not a characteristic of Arabic overall, might have been a specifically Ḥijāzi feature added to another, that of velarisation. This would yield al-Lāh as the original form,¹⁰⁵ and bring the matter into the ambit of central Arabian usage of this form, on evidence of a unique occurrence in an Arabic inscription written in south Arabian *musnad* script, some centuries prior to Islam, at Qaryat al-Fāw, mentioning, among others, a divinity called *ʾlh*, read as *Lāh, as we have seen. This identification of the

¹⁰⁰ Blau, 'Miscellanies', 175 f.

¹⁰¹ Littmann, *Syriac Inscriptions*, x, and see Blau, 'Miscellanies', 176.

¹⁰² Ambros, 'Entstehung', 30.

¹⁰³ Ambros, 'Entstehung', 27 f., 31, 31 n. 37, 32; Ferguson, 'Emphatic l', § 5, and cf. the reservations of Blau ('Miscellanies', 176 f., 176 n. 8) about emphasis in Syriac, who also proposes that Allāh and Alāha emerged independently.

¹⁰⁴ This is relevant to three words occurring in the Qur'ān: Allāh, *nās* and *ūlī*: Testen, *Parallels*, 214.

¹⁰⁵ Testen, *Parallels*, 217 ff.

original form would carry conviction, in terms of the present argument, if one were to eliminate the definite article as an element of explanation, and settle for the absolute form *Allāh* without velarisation. And this would indicate a possible connection with the Arabic of Kinda in association with their domains and extensions, which did reach up at certain points to Zabād, and had an incidence at al-Ḥīra.

All the foregoing lends sustenance to the major point being made here, that Allāh was a divine name available in its absolute form, in which perspective morphological considerations would, when and if convincing, serve at best a purely antiquarian interest. Moreover, if, in contrast, one persisted in making the unsafe assumption that Allāh be deliberately derived from *Lāh* morphologically, one might point out that it is not uncommon in Arabic for the *al-* to function, not only as an article, but as a demonstrative pronoun (*ism ishāra*) in adverbial form, a feature shared with the Hebrew *ha-*.¹⁰⁶ This would take us again to the possibility of considering this as a proper name in the vocative mode.

The integral adoption of Allāh in the absolute form, prior to suffixation or any other grammatical operation, was noted by some classical Arab grammarians, who maintained that Allāh as a proper name fell into the nominal class of *murtajal*. What is being suggested about the lack of an etymological relationship of Allāh to the definite article *al-* has also been safely established with respect to the *al-* component in the name of *ʾlt*, Allāt,¹⁰⁷ as we saw in the previous chapter. The *murtajal* is that class of proper nouns that exist only as integral proper names, with the name specific to an individual or improvised for that individual, in contrast to the other class of derived proper nouns termed *manqūl*, a substantive or verbal construct characterised as topical or as transferred from some other use, such as generic use (an example would be the proper name *Asad*, lion), metaphorical transference of meaning or attribute, onomatopoeia or some other operation.¹⁰⁸ This sets the name Allāh apart from names such as Rabb or Baʿal, into which is transferred a general meaning of superordination among humans, or indeed from *ʾlh*. Allāh's autonomy from the world involving *āliha* is a point that will become clearer as this discussion progresses.

¹⁰⁶ Baʿalbakī, *Fiqh al-ʿArabiyya*, 249 f.: thus the Arabic *al-yawm* and the Hebrew *hayyom* for 'today'. It is established that the demonstrative *-ha* is related to the alternation between the initial *ʾl* and the initial *h* ('Article, definite', *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, 1.188).

¹⁰⁷ Hāmeen-Antilla, and Rollinger, 'Herodot', 87 f.

¹⁰⁸ "-l-h", *LA*; Caetani and Gabrieli, *Onomasticon*, 1:§ 8; Wright, *Grammar*, § 191(8); 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.23.

What is being suggested, that the divine name Allāh as it entered the Arabic language, irrespective of its origin or etymology, is an independent proper noun of the *murtajal* class,¹⁰⁹ is sustained further by a number of considerations. It is a very specific and indeed a unique proper name indicating a particular deity who, in the early period of the Qur'ān, nevertheless retained both a generic and a specific local meaning, an intransitive name but with properties shared by others, as we shall see. To the Qur'ānic polemical question in a Meccan *sūra* (Q, 19.65) as to whether the hearers of the Qur'ānic recitation knew of anyone who shared the name of Muḥammad's Rabb, so far generic but also now with a specific habitation, the implied answer was clearly in the negative.

Ultimately, whatever the historical or the remote morphological connections of the proper name Allāh, it appears that this phenomenon is best regarded from the angle of pragmatics, historical linguistics and sociolinguistics. The Arabic subscription on the Zabad inscription invokes the succour of *ʾl-ʾlh*, 'the God', a common epithet for named divinities used for the Christian God, here uniquely with the Arabic definite article *al-*. But the authors of this inscription used **al-Ilāh*, and clearly had no cause to form a syncope, which is possible in Arabic but not inherently necessary. Moreover, **al-Ilāh* figures here as an epithet and category descriptor, not a proper name for a divinity (in this case, the Christian divinity). The same generic-definite expression, *al-Ilāh*, was used for Muḥammad's God in a poem by the well-travelled al-A'shā (who never converted), while also using the name Allāh,¹¹⁰ his use of the latter name providing evidence for the use to some extent of Allāh by Christians in the region of al-Ḥira.¹¹¹

The emergence to primacy, and then to exclusivity, of Muḥammad's deity Allāh is therefore 'not self-evident'.¹¹² We are not in a position to account for the spread of the name Allāh, a name afloat in jurative formulae and theophoric names, and possibly among some Christians to the north. We still lack a map of the geographical distribution of this name and of its users, although Kinda, as suggested, seems to be the best candidate, and we have as yet no way of telling if its geography indicated any spatial or social hierarchy that governed its incidence and frequency, or if we need to assume a model of random dispersal. But some suggestions regarding the attractiveness of Allāh, leading to His ultimate adoption by Muḥammad, are not inconceivable.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Testen, *Parallels*, 222.

¹¹⁰ Al-A'shā, *Dīwān*, 17.16, 20, 21.

¹¹¹ 'Adī b. Zayd, *Dīwān*, 6.19 and *passim*; for an Arabic inscription that could go back to the sixth century (the dating is uncertain), al-Ka'bī, 'Report', 63 f.

¹¹² Simon, 'Allah or God?', 133.

It may or may not have been the case that the Arabs of the Ḥijāz, and reputedly elsewhere, would appeal to a certain Allāh in situations of special distress.¹¹³ One would interpret this, if true, in line with the aggregative nature of pagan divinities implied in syncretism, as the appeal to multiple deities in case of need, and to a vaguer being for good measure and added value. Such added value and measure persisted of course into Islamic times, where early inscriptions invoking the blessings of, together, Allāh, His angels and Believers reflected an enunciative habitus which survives still.¹¹⁴

Whatever the truth of the matter, the opaque, distant presence of an Allāh among a multiplicity of other, more frequently invoked and cultically more concrete and better-rooted local deities, would certainly have been an advantage for this floating signifier's later career. This was the advantage of a certain distinctiveness, emphasised by vagueness,¹¹⁵ for, in circumstances such as this, vagueness of designation could add force to an enunciation,¹¹⁶ in this case a vocative enunciation. The appeal to locally rootless exotic deities in such circumstances is not altogether unusual,¹¹⁷ and obscurity does play a role in binding acolytes to masters, however defined.¹¹⁸ In this regard, Allāh bears certain affinities to the Israelite Yahweh. This latter was also a remote, exotic divinity, the meaning of whose name is hard to establish,¹¹⁹ his very remoteness conveying a sense of abeyance and regularity.¹²⁰ He was a divinity who was native neither to the Israelites nor to Palestine, having in all likelihood originated in the north-east of the Arabian Peninsula east of the Red Sea, and moved on to Sinai and the Negev through the mediation of the southern caravaneers.¹²¹

Poetic evidence, and old Arabic poetry is only most minimally religious,¹²² points to some sparing use of Allāh in a formulaic and generic

¹¹³ Muslim traditions, in which this idea occurs, have contradictory views of this very common claim: *SII*, §§ 15, 127.

¹¹⁴ For instance, Barāmkī, 'al-Nuqūsh', nos. 5, 6, 12, 81 and *passim*.

¹¹⁵ It has been noted that having no idol was in itself a mark of distinctiveness for Allāh: Healey, *Religion*, 84. A comparison with the vague distinctiveness of Sol and of the solar cult attributed to the Syrians and Syrian Arabs during an earlier period might yield interesting results: see Seyrig, 'Antiquités syriennes', 95'.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Eco, *Semiotics*, § 2.7.3

¹¹⁷ Compare, for instance, Hierapolitan (west Anatolian) appeals to the distant Ionian Apollo of Claros, rather than the local Apollo, during the outbreak of plague in the mid second century: Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*, 4.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Gellner, 'Is belief really necessary?', 34. ¹¹⁹ 'Yahweh', *DDD*, 913.

¹²⁰ Weber, *Sociology*, 17 f., 34. ¹²¹ Smith, *Origins*, 145, 272 n. 38; 'Yahweh', *DDD*, 911 f.

¹²² See Hirschberg, *Lehren*, 28 ff., for an attempt to disengage the religious contents in the poetry of one group of urbanised and courtly pre-Islamic Arab poets, and Brockelmann, 'Allah', 100 f., 105 ff.

sense (and as the deity of a Christian monk, which may be a later interpolation or a rendition of the Aramaic *Alāha*). This formulaic sense, used almost as a topos, may have strengthened His appeal in oaths. There is a report concerning a document written by the hand of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, Muḥammad's paternal grandfather, relating to a loan he made to a person in Ṣan'ā, to which was added the statement that Allāh is a witness to the agreement – if the document quoted is genuine, mention of Allāh may well have been a later gloss, as is the monetary denomination attributed to this document, although the rest of the document has the due detailed form and archaic diction expected in such a text.¹²³ Thus also, in a situation remote from solemnity, a repartee between two lovers shows the mistrustful woman insisting tartly that her lover should swear by Allāh's right hand rather than by his own.¹²⁴ One might say that this jurative use of Allāh might be compared in some respects to the invocation of Jove in the exclamation of an old-world Englishman.¹²⁵ Closer to home, and as if to underline the obscurity of byways taken by divine names, some characterised by extraordinary longevity and disengagement from 'original' senses and contexts, it may be useful to indicate that in the Levantine colloquial Arabic of today one still occasionally appeals to a Yāhū in situations of vexation, frustration and distress. This expression has been interpreted as a secondary form of Yahweh, but may very well have been entirely independent in provenance.¹²⁶ One might also mention in this connection other terms of extraordinary longevity which, having lost specific reference, are most serviceable for magical invocations, unlocking powers and thereby acting as epicleses, the prime examples of which might be *abracadabra* and *hocus pocus*. In all cases, the use of the divine name falls within the category of speech-acts, actions performed *by* an enunciative act (perlocution) or *in* an act of enunciation (illocution). What we have in these and in similar instances altogether is an enhancement of illocutionary energy corresponding to a diminution in propositional or otherwise semantic content.

If Allāh was indeed, as claimed traditionally, considered to be the 'High God',¹²⁷ His elevation must be interpreted metaphorically, denoting less

¹²³ Al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 8; Ibn Qutayba, *Faḍl*, 88 f.

¹²⁴ Poems by al-Nābigha al-Dhubānī (17.18) and Imru' al-Qays (200.4–5) in Arazi and Masalha, *Six Early Arab Poets*; 'Allah' in *ibid.*, 'Concordance'. God's right hand is also mentioned by Mālik b. al-Rayb, in al-Qaysī, *Shu'arā'*, 21.2.

¹²⁵ Similarly, mincing the name of God as 'gosh' and 'golly' may well have involved initially a hedging, by nominal transference, against insincerity and profanation, before the divine association and the fear of profanation were lost, with the jurative or vocative function of this speech-act remaining.

¹²⁶ It is proposed in 'Yahweh', *DDD*, 900, that there were three abbreviated secondary forms for the Yahweh theonym in evidence: Yā, Yāhū, Yēhō.

¹²⁷ Most recently, Crone, 'Religion', 177 ff. *Contra* this view, Brockelmann, 'Allah', 104 f., 104 n. 1.

a transcendent spatial location and individuation with an associated cosmology and myth than a supernumerary remoteness, that of a 'potential' deity¹²⁸ and a floating signifier. The caveat is that, unlike a *deus otiosus*, this deity was not one who had withdrawn from managing the affairs of the world, devolving this to lesser deities, according to some pantheonic mythological scheme, but one who had never been in charge.

It has long been realised, but without drawing concrete conclusions, that the pre-Muḥammadan Allāh lay outside the ambit of Arab cultic divinities,¹²⁹ and that, for His few attributes recoverable from Arabic poetry, such a deity bereft of cult cannot be considered to have been a generic deity in the form of a 'collective singular', abstracted from local deities and appropriating their functions, as a High God might.¹³⁰ If such a god be invoked in moments of distress or need, such invocation might be interpreted as an act of doubling the force of the vocative illocution involved, rather than appeal to a specific being whose name has specific connotations with particular functions and capacities. This invocation would have been an appeal to sublime agency in general over and above a deity or group of deities in particular, much as indistinct spirits are invoked.

Such invocation of deities without social and cultic rootedness and without specific forms of worship can in itself have little consequence for religious history; a deity thus invoked appears to have been understood as a god of all in general and of no one in particular. Vague distinctiveness along with a presence, an interstitial condition within and without boundaries, everywhere dispersed, a presence however vague and diffuse: such a condition can also give rise to claims of self-evidence, of truth obscured by facts of prevailing religion, claims systematised in classical Arabic historiography and in Islamic literature, and accepted, in large measure uncritically, by modern scholarship. How this vague distinctiveness was achieved might only be determined once a historical geography of the distribution and use of the name Allāh is available.

That He has no namesake, though His names be several, al-Rabb, al-Raḥmān or Allāh, and that He be invoked by His qualifiers and predicates, his Beatific Names (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā* – Q, 59.22 ff. for a litany of partial enumeration); that He be unique yet multiple in name; that He could

¹²⁸ Chelhod, *Structures*, 97.

¹²⁹ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 223 f.

¹³⁰ Brockelmann, 'Allah', 104, 105 ff. – the author adopts, by way of interpretation, a theory no longer tenable, that there did exist among a variety of people in Australia, America and Africa, as among ancient Aryans and as with the El 'Elyon and El 'Olam of the Israelites, a general belief in an ultimate Creator (*Urheber*), but is nevertheless keen to differentiate this from the notion of an *Urmonotheismus* (119 f.).

admonish his worshippers and deniers by asserting that He is but One (Q, 41.6 and *passim*) without the necessity for qualification: such were serious claims in the circumstances of pagan Arabia, and made severely counter-intuitive and inhabitual, even exorbitant demands on votaries and worshippers. For what is claimed here, and what is demanded, is submission to a tautology, the tautology of a deity making self-referential claims to self-definition and self-naming abstracted from specific cults, a self-identical deity who speaks in the manner of a previous one who stated: 'See now that I, I am He' (Deut. 32.39). Inhabitual and perhaps also counter-intuitive demands mark the point from which is exercised a claim for the indivisibility of legitimacy by which order is installed and a habitus, new or continuing, is inculcated.¹³¹ In the case of the Muḥammadan Allāh, the very arbitrariness, and indeed in the eyes of Muḥammad's adversaries the very absurdity of the claims he made for his deity, will in themselves have been the sharp edge of Paleo-Muslim self-demarcation from Arab polytheism, in which what appears arbitrary and absurd to the foe comes to confirm the position of the protagonist.¹³²

The self-predication of God has a venerable history,¹³³ not least in the self-definition of the Israelite Yahweh whose very name is cast in a verbal form and has been interpreted as *'hyh*, 'I am',¹³⁴ making it altogether possible to dispense with the theonym and to consider it superfluous.¹³⁵ Self-predication appears as an important marker of the move to mono-latry and monotheism, and dramatises the transition from divine names to the names of God,¹³⁶ when the generic appellative becomes a proper name, when the theonym loses memory of origin, and when its object acquires personality capable of taking on attributes.¹³⁷ This is the ultimate form for the expression of authority, premised on a charter of limitless arbitrariness and at the zero degree of signification. As noted by an early Qur'ānic exegete, the meaning of a divine name is essentially *rabb*-hood,

¹³¹ The notion of 'symbolic violence' might usefully be employed as an overarching concept here – cf. Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction*, book 1. The inhabitual claims made by the emergent order under Muḥammad was the subject of a famous study, now in need of revision in many crucial respects: Goldziher, 'Muruwwa and Din', in *Muslim Studies*.

¹³² See the comments on the uses of arbitrariness and absurdity in Bourdieu, 'Genèse et structure', 310, and 'Absurdität', *EM. Bell (Origins*, 51, 97) considers that Muḥammad liked to introduce unfamiliar words by design, a certain obscurity being appropriate to divine revelation.

¹³³ Westermann, *Basic Forms*, 125.

¹³⁴ 'Yahweh', *DDD*, 913 f., for this and other possible interpretations.

¹³⁵ Gladigow, 'Gottesnamen', 1214 f.

¹³⁶ This is emblematised by Usener (*Götternamen*, 337 and *passim*) in the change from *perì tōn theōn tōn onomāton* to *perì theion onomāton*.

¹³⁷ Usener, *Götternamen*, 326 f.

boundless sovereignty and superordination overall (*rubūbiyya*).¹³⁸ This is the boundless lordship of a deity who, however named, is yet individual and a person, combining the individual identification mark with a generic concept which was ultimately to indicate Him alone, moving from precise denotation and specific location to connotation and a very considerable extension of semantic range.¹³⁹

This arbitrariness marks out the development discussed as a political process and as a command economy of the divine, rather than as a natural emergence from a process internal to the morphological transformations of *ʾlh*. Allāh acquired His status and privileges by socio-political means, and these included both the subversion of regnant Arab polytheism and the derangement of the temporal rhythms of cult, as we shall see. Two processes were involved in this amplification of Muḥammad's *sui generis* deity from the local to the ubiquitous: cultic centralisation and its socio-political correlates, and the semantic, mythical and theological means by which Muḥammad's deity acquired a scripturalist persona which He defined progressively as He addressed His Prophet.¹⁴⁰

Paleo-Muslim divinity

It can be established by the chronology of the Qur'ān that there were three distinct proper names for the unique deity which appeared in succession – Qur'ānic chronological schemes being regarded as having an indicative and 'diagrammatic' value. Nothing in the Qur'ān supports the common supposition that the deity who speaks in the text had, right from the beginning of his occurrence in the text, all the attributes and capacities progressively assigned to Him in the course of what Muslims regard as revelation.¹⁴¹ The identification of the Qur'ānic deity consecutively as Rabb, al-Raḥmān and Allāh had been noted over a century ago.¹⁴²

In the earliest Meccan *sūras*, hearers were summoned to worship and serve the Rabb. This was a deity at once generic and specific to the Meccan Ka'ba as an animate energy to be supplicated and propitiated. There is here no question of monotheism,¹⁴³ and there is no implication in this

¹³⁸ MbS, 4.285. ¹³⁹ Cf. Ullmann, *Semantics*, 71 ff.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Wellhausen, *Reste*, 218 f. A detailed discussion of this theme as it appears in the pronominal forms of the Qur'ān that affirm that it is the result of revelation, not of simple prophecy, has been given by Neuwirth (*Koran*, 321 f.).

¹⁴¹ Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 226.

¹⁴² Grimme, *Muhammad*, 2.35 ff. For a review of these nominative transitions, see Welch, 'Allah'.

¹⁴³ This point was already noted in 1936 by Fueck, 'Originality', 90, and later by Blachère, *Coran*, 2.7. The chronology of the emergence of monotheistic ideas in the Qur'ānic text has been considered by Ju'ayṭ, *Sīra*, 2.194 ff., 265.

period, preceding Muḥammad's receipt of messages from his deity and his investment with an apostolic mission, of a notion of divinity beyond that ordinarily held by Arab polytheists (among others: Q, 99–103, 113–14).

Though these premonitory, admonitory, warning verses are often taken for apocalyptic, the use of this particular term is unfortunate and misleading, as apocalyptic declamation presupposes a particular, linear notion of time and a *Heilsgeschichte* which had not yet arisen among Muḥammad and his followers in any form. Biblical elements in later Qur'ānic passages are used as illustrative moral examples rather than a connected *Heilsgeschichte*.¹⁴⁴ Neither is there any indication that Muḥammad had apocalyptic notions and aspirations *ab initio*,¹⁴⁵ although one must say that eschatological scenarios came in gradually as a common interpretative scheme, being grafted upon accounts of impending catastrophes to be visited upon those who repudiate the preaching of Muḥammad the Warner, in this world rather than in the next.¹⁴⁶ Let it be recalled that Muḥammad was to be designated as God's Apostle, not a Messiah, although it is not to be excluded that some individuals, under impressions gained from the type of Christianity and Judaism discussed above, might have understood his warnings in vaguely eschatological terms – terms that coloured the reception of developing Qur'ānic notions, according to the feedback-loop model of Qur'ānic composition sketched in chapter 7 below.

Like some Arab visionaries before him, Muḥammad had an acute sense of impending catastrophe, energised by the impulses of a very exceptional man. Muḥammad's earlier visions were thus essentially cataclysmic,¹⁴⁷ unconnected to cycles of prophecy and regress as are normally associated with the monotheistic schemes of universal history, in which prophecy is renewed following the renewal of humanity's serial recidivism. This was a vision of concrete calamity, not of a Last Judgement applied to individual miscreants and maleficents. In writing Muḥammad's biography, it appears in the light of this that it is crucial to separate the stage of Warner from that of Apostle. The former was not just a *praeparatio*, but different as to its conception of Muḥammad's task and of his deity as well.

¹⁴⁴ Donner, *Narratives*, 80 ff.

¹⁴⁵ Donner (*Muhammad*, 246) appeals to the 'forcefulness and immediacy of the apocalyptic imagery' in early Meccan *sūras*, but of course such forcefulness and immediacy need not be restricted to imagery of the End of Time.

¹⁴⁶ Bell, *Commentary*, 2.337 f.; *Origins*, 90. 103; Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 133 f., 158; Marshall, *God*, 49, 53 ff.; Donner, 'Question du messianisme'; Donner, 'Qur'ān', 45.

¹⁴⁷ On cosmic Qur'ānic cataclysmic imagery in relation to apocalyptic imagery, see Cook, 'Messianism', 46.

Such a cataclysmic vision was not unfamiliar to pagan Arabs.¹⁴⁸ It was a vision sustained by experience, living, as the Arabs did, under extraordinarily tenuous and precarious ecological conditions, vulnerable to the vagaries of earth and sky, sometimes with the destruction of entire communities, with dearth and abundance, dependent on the seasons, predictable but not always dependable. They had legends of the destruction of ancient Arab peoples, by geological and meteorological means, but also by pests and disease (*dhurr, ru'āf*).¹⁴⁹ One possible interpretation of the 'Ijl b. Hafām inscription at Qaryat al-Fāw mentions the sky raining blood and the earth blazing and enflamed.¹⁵⁰ Such cataclysm is more akin to manifestations of betylic wrath of the highest order, the only means for the control of which were invocation, propitiation and penitence. Let it be emphasised that betylic wrath in this context is better ascribed to ritual lassitude and remorse about human actions, than to incorrect belief or to impiety theologically considered. It is not the eschatological end of time that is involved in this conception, but rather the end of one collective lifetime relative to a particular community. In all cases, one needs to factor in a vision of repetitive Fate; nations have what the Qur'ān calls *ajal musammā*, which is more aptly to be interpreted as betokening a recursive and degenerative rather than a redemptive notion of time, putting a repeated end to all things familiar, rather than the Judgement Day.¹⁵¹ In a way, this vision might be taken for a condensation of the highly pessimistic and bleak concept of the future as it appears in Arabic poetry, a future of general insecurity and uncertainty, the plaything of Fortune toying with humanity and nature together,¹⁵² concretised in the potent imagery of cosmic disasters.

Some of the most familiar manifestations of betylic wrath are such matters as droughts and destructive flash-floods (which were also the source of underground water, and therefore signs of benediction as well), flash-floods being especially grievous in a settlement such as Mecca, where habitation was generally concentrated in ravines, gorges and canyons, being also particularly susceptible to tectonically and meteorologically induced landslides and rock-falls.¹⁵³ One earthquake seems definitely to have occurred

¹⁴⁸ See Sinai, *Fortschreibung*, 85. ¹⁴⁹ 'Alwān, *Mu'taqadāt*, 21 ff.

¹⁵⁰ Al-Anṣārī, *Qaryat al-Fāw*, 21, lines 8–10, contested by Beeston, 'Nemara and Faw', 1, and read in a contrary sense of the sky continuing to rain and the earth continuing to thrive. See Ba'albakī, 'Huwiyyat al-'Arabiyya', n. 37.

¹⁵¹ Thus *contra* Ettinghausen, *Polemik*, 37 f. See 'Cursing and blessing', *ERE*, 4.367a–b, 368b, 373b.

¹⁵² On this concept of the future, Tamer, *Zeit*, 49, 84.

¹⁵³ Tectonic activity has been described perceptively as 'an instance of humanity's closeness to the underworld': Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, 419.

in Medina during Muḥammad's lifetime, most probably in 626.¹⁵⁴ One must also identify such manifestations of betylic wrath with the unusual and bewildering meteorological, astronomical and seismic prodigies that Muḥammad and his contemporaries witnessed and read as portents, and one must recognise the occurrence of actual events, and not simply always assume a mass-psychological state of collective suggestion. These included what may well have been the prodigy glossed in the Qur'ān as the rending of the moon (Q, 54.1), which is likely to have been a lunar eclipse coinciding with the so-called Canterbury meteoroid swarm, a most impressive prodigy described by English monks in 1178 as one in which 'the upper horn of the moon seemed split in two and a flame shot from it', the flame being the meteoroid swarm.¹⁵⁵ Halley's Comet was visible in the Ḥijāz in 607,¹⁵⁶ and meteorite showers may have occurred in 571 and 609.¹⁵⁷ A good number of partial and total lunar eclipses visible in Mecca are on record for the period 570–622; so are a number of partial solar eclipses, some of impressive depth and duration, in 577, 590, 604 and 613.¹⁵⁸

But the matter does not stop at calamities and prodigies witnessed. It also includes punishments visited upon peoples of yore, recorded in the so-called Qur'ānic chastisement narratives or *Straflegenden*, which others have preferred to characterise as 'retribution pericopes',¹⁵⁹ but which might more aptly be termed chastisement pericopes. This vision of portentous calamities and prodigies was equally a vision of the annihilation of Arab peoples of the past, most exemplarily the legendary 'Ād and the historical Thamūd that have already been discussed, but also of Pharaoh's Egyptians

¹⁵⁴ Ambraseys, Melville and Adams, *Seismicity*, 25. On the geological susceptibility of the area to earthquakes and other seismic activity, see *ibid.*, chs. 1.1, 4.2 and the Saudi Geological Survey at www.sgs.org.sa (accessed on 2 October 2008). A most serviceable seismotectonic map can be found in the *Tübinger Atlas*, A.II.3.

¹⁵⁵ The famous Qur'ānic splitting of the moon has generally been disregarded in modern scholarship or taken for a phantasm. Bell (*Commentary*, 2.323) gave credence to it, conjecturing it may have been a partial lunar eclipse. The technical argument for this, and for the dating to May or June 617, is sketched by Ahmad, 'Meteoroid swarm', 95 f. – following, for the Canterbury Swarm, K. Brecher, 'The Canterbury swarm: ancient and modern observations of a new feature of the solar system', *Bulletin of the American Astronomical Society*, 16 (1984), 476.

¹⁵⁶ Cook, 'Messianism', 46 f. (the author also maintains that the meaning of the *shihāb* in the Qur'ān is uncertain); Donner, 'Qur'ān', 45 ff.; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.251.

¹⁵⁷ Rada and Stephenson, 'Catalogue', 9, 11.

¹⁵⁸ See the NASA catalogues of lunar and solar eclipses at <http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov> (2 October 2008). It seems unnecessary to deduce from the conjunction of the crescent moon and Venus in the night-sky above Mecca on 23 July 610 a connection with the supposed onset of revelation and with the Qur'ānic Night of Destiny (Q, 44.3, 97.1–3, late Meccan): Ahmad, 'Dawn sky'.

¹⁵⁹ On the scholarship, Marshall, *God*, 27 ff.; for surveys in rough Qur'ānic chronological order, *ibid.*, ch. 3, and Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 127 ff. See Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 2; Sinai, *Fortschreibung*, 84.

and the People of Lot.¹⁶⁰ Narratively, these and other examples of calamity visited upon peoples in the past are on many occasions assimilated to each other, especially the Noah/‘Ād/Thamūd ‘triad’, serving similar purposes and directed at Muḥammad’s opponents by way of example.¹⁶¹ Annihilation of Arab peoples was a warning to Quraysh, delivered by the pre-prophetic Muḥammad the Warner, *al-Nadhīr* – a vision which was to get a Biblicalised patterning in later portions of the Qur’ān,¹⁶² although it must be said that this patterning does not follow a straight line of development.¹⁶³ In all cases, there is no need to suppose that Resurrection was implied, rather than the usual way in which the gods destroy nations and bring others into place, when the Qur’ān spoke of a New Creation, *khalq^{un} jadīd^{un}* (14.19, 35.16).¹⁶⁴ These are stories of re-foundation, working like Fate, conducive to primaeva terror of the chaos following betylic wrath. Muḥammad was, after all, a Warner to his own people.¹⁶⁵ Only later was he to become an apostle for whom universal claims were made and who warned of the end of all time.

In very many cases, implicit reference was made to the actions of Muḥammad’s adversaries, such as their loss of the Battle of Badr, during which Muḥammad’s people were the agents of divine chastisement,¹⁶⁶ and Muḥammad often figured in these stories, in which his Meccan adversaries were used as a model of people deserving of punishment, in a scenario where Muḥammad figured as the double of past prophets/heroes.¹⁶⁷ As a Warner, Muḥammad was not so much stating that his adversaries, often misled by God deliberately, were predestined to destruction; this was largely confined to polemical passages of the Qur’ān. Rather, there was an appeal by the Warner to the good will of his audience.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁰ On the annihilation of peoples, and the terrifying visions thereof, Toelle, *Coran*, ch. 3, *passim*, and Stetkevych, *Golden Bough*, 81 f.; on the Qur’ānic Scream, *al-sayḥa* (Q, 15.38, 29.36, 31.54, 40.29, 41.23, 42.50, 49.36, 53.36, 67.11, 94.11, 73.15, 83.15), related to the seismic destruction of north Arabian peoples. Like *al-sayḥa*, *al-qārī’a* (Q, 13.31, 69.4) also refers to a worldly calamity: Bell, *Commentary*, 2.575, though this word’s occurrence at Q, 101.1 might bear a different interpretation.

¹⁶¹ Watt, *Bell’s Introduction*, 133 f. Bell (*Origins*, 107) held that Biblical themes of Pharaoh were conjoined but clearly distinguished from those of Thamūd, while Horowitz (*Untersuchungen*, 31) held the boundaries to have been indistinct; Marshall (*God*, 142) considers that Thamūd and Aṣḥāb al-Fil were assimilated to each other.

¹⁶² Chabbi, *Coran*, 125 ff. Needless to say, Biblical themes were in their turn Arabised in terms of concrete reference. The Qur’ānic Deluge (Toelle, *Coran*, 188 ff.) was caused, not by torrential rain, but by warm ground-water. Although the theme of warm waters is also present in some Midrashic texts (Geiger, *Muhammed*, 110 f.), one need not pursue the infinite regress implied in the chase after textual parallelisms.

¹⁶³ Räisänen, *Divine Hardening*, 42. ¹⁶⁴ Cf. Bell, *Commentary*, 1.410.

¹⁶⁵ Watt, *Bell’s Introduction*, 26 ff.; Bell, *Commentary*, 2.1; ‘Warner’, EQ, 5.460.

¹⁶⁶ Bell, *Origins*, 140 ff. ¹⁶⁷ Horowitz, *Untersuchungen*, 29 f.

¹⁶⁸ Räisänen, *Divine Hardening*, 14 ff., 43.

Not much needs to be said about this betylic Rabb requiring worship and occurring in the earliest Meccan period beyond what was discussed in the previous chapter. He resided in the Black Stone at Mecca, a Meccan deity counterposed to other deities who resided outside Mecca, including al-'Uzzā of Quraysh, masters of Mecca. Yet this Rabb was perhaps too generic, too well enracinated and too familiar to carry conviction for an anxious call, like Muḥammad's, for change. It is not surprising in view of this that other divine names were introduced to signal the distinctiveness of Muḥammad's deity, with both a vague and a distant familiarity. Rabb occurs sixty-seven times in the Qur'ān, with decreasing frequency over time, being used fifty-four times in Meccan and thirteen times in Medinan *sūras*. It is perhaps testimony to Muḥammad's sense of urgency, and to the opposition he faced, that within a very short period of time, within a year of Muḥammad's receipt of his divine commission, al-Raḥmān was introduced, and in smaller measure Allāh, as the proper name of this Rabb, a god Meccan yet generic and ubiquitous, as if by a preliminary expansion of intension and extension which were yet to crystallise a distinctive semantic content.

We have seen that al-Raḥmān was already used in the definite form *Rḥmn* as the major divine name in south Arabia. It occurs in the Aramaic form *Rahmānā* both in the Talmud and in Christian literature of the sixth century.¹⁶⁹ The theonym al-Raḥmān also appears sparingly in ancient Arabic poetry,¹⁷⁰ and in four epicletic litanies of invocation (*talbiya*), one by a south Arabian clan.¹⁷¹ Earlier, *Rḥmn* was used as a qualifier for 'Azīzu in Palmyra and for other deities elsewhere, in the form *Dhū Raḥmūn. This epithet appeared as a qualifier for Baalshamīn in Ḥawrān. A deity by the name al-Raḥmān is very likely to have been known, and possibly worshipped cultically, in al-Yamāma, in east-central Arabia in Muḥammad's time.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ See also *CIS*, nos. 537 ff.; Hirschberg, *Lehren*, 68 ff.; Rosenthal, 'Islam', 2.165; 'Simeon's new letter', in Shahid, *Martyrs*, 54; Jomier, 'Divine name', 210 ff.

¹⁷⁰ Al-A'shā, *Dīwān*, 15.36; Seidensticker, 'Sources', 311 ff. The name does not occur in the Arazī/Masalha concordance: Arazī and Masalha, *Early Arab Poets*.

¹⁷¹ Kister, 'Labbayka', Arabic text, nos. 37, 39; Seidensticker, 'Sources', 314, who suspects the authenticity of these four texts.

¹⁷² Korotaev, Klimenko and Proussakov, 'Origins', 255 f.; Février, *Religion*, 22; 'Baalshamin', *LIMC*; Fahd, *Panthéon*, 141. Al-Hallāq (*Maslama*, 134) makes the suggestion that it was from there that he came to be known in Mecca, following an encounter between Muḥammad and Musaylima b. Ḥabīb. But it is probably an exaggeration to regard portions of the *sūra* of al-Raḥmān (Q. 55.62 ff.) as having been Musaylima's, on the grounds that it contains the vocabulary of a settled agricultural population, as in *ibid.*, 102 ff. On the agriculturalist vocabulary and the 'agrarian atmosphere' of many parts of the Qur'ān, see Crone, 'How did the Qur'ānic pagans', 387 ff., 396.

Whatever His byway into Mecca, al-Raḥmān's appearance in the Qur'ān as the principal proper name for the unique deity of Muḥammad was as brief as it was intense, thereafter occurring only sparsely in late Meccan or Medinan *sūras* as a personal theonym, but also frequently as an epithet of Allāh, to which he was assimilated, from around the beginning of the second Meccan period. Various forms derived from *ʾlh* occur with increasing frequency in the Medinan period, in which they occur 1,811 times compared with 1,040 occurrences in the Meccan period, although it will be remembered that these various forms are often semantically and conceptually distinct from Allāh. Throughout the Qur'ān, the name al-Raḥmān appears in the definite form almost invariably as a proper name.¹⁷³ Of fifty-six occurrences, the word appears only seven times as a qualifying epithet, in conjunction with al-Raḥīm. In all other cases, al-Raḥmān always occurs alone (Raḥīm occurs alone in only four out of its 115 occurrences, but never, when occurring alone, with the definite article).¹⁷⁴ Moreover, unlike other names which became the Beatific Names, al-Raḥmān never qualifies any theonym apart from Allāh or al-Rabb, whom he also designates fully while other Beatific names qualify Him as attributes or epithets – the adjective *raḥīm* at one point characterises Muḥammad himself (Q, 9.128).¹⁷⁵ In all, the litmus test of a theonym used as a personal name is that it bears epithets and qualifiers; epithets themselves are non-predicative terms.

In other words, al-Raḥman, Allāh and al-Rabb are on a par in indicating a polyonymous personal deity. In fact, in *sūras* belonging to the period in which both Allāh and al-Raḥmān were used together, al-Raḥmān when judged by frequency of occurrence emerges as the principal personal name of Muḥammad's God,¹⁷⁶ with Allāh possibly used rather vaguely, as expected. Al-Raḥmān was introduced into Muḥammad's circle as the theophoric element in personal names; 'Abd al-Raḥmān had been hitherto unknown in Mecca, although there were some occurrences in al-Ṭā'if.¹⁷⁷

Yet, given the nature of Arab paganism, it is not surprising that this situation might well have been understood as one in which al-Raḥmān

¹⁷³ Most consistently in the *sūra* of Maryam (Q, 19.87 f., 92 ff.), but also in the *sūra* of al-Anbiyā' (Q, 21.26, 36, 42, 112), and in Q, 25.26, 60, 16.5. This also applies to occurrences of this name in poetry: Abū Raḥma, 'Qirā'a', 115 f.

¹⁷⁴ On double epithets of the divine in the Qur'ān, see Gaudefroy-Demombynes, 'Quelques noms', 6, 9 ff.

¹⁷⁵ Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishtiqāq*, 58; al-Qurṭubī (*al-Jāmi'*, 1.105 f.) maintains (at 1.103) that, like the theonym Allāh, al-Raḥmān is not a derived name but exists only in the absolute state; 'r-ḥ-m', *LA*; Gaudefroy-Demombynes, 'Quelques noms', 8; Jomier, 'Divine name', 197 f.

¹⁷⁶ See the word-counts, related to chronology, in Jomier, 'Divine name', 205 n., and Robinson, *Discovering*, 90 f.

¹⁷⁷ Jomier, 'Divine name', 368 f.

and Allāh were regarded as two distinct gods. Qur'ānic evidence of the lack of complete familiarity with this name in Mecca should be taken seriously.¹⁷⁸ Early exegetical lore preserves traces of the belief that the two names denoted distinct deities, somewhat confused as the chronology may well be. Some Meccans held that al-Raḥmān was the deity of al-Yamāma, unrecognised and unacceptable to them for the purposes of witnessing the Treaty of al-Ḥudaybiyya.¹⁷⁹ Some stated that He was Musaylima himself,¹⁸⁰ most likely building upon Arab beliefs in jinnic transmogrification, jinnic-human doubles and the indefinite status of the supernatural, but also, as Wellhausen speculated long ago, that Musaylima, like Muḥammad, often related his revelation in the first person singular, in the manner of a seer.¹⁸¹ This suggests that the speaker and the ultimate sender of the message might be grafted upon each other in terms of the authoritativeness of enunciations delivered.¹⁸² On the basis of an inscription in Najrān dated 523 (*Rbhd b-Mḥmd*), it has been suggested that the name Muḥammad had been used as a theonym for the Lord of the Jews and that, like Musaylima and some Roman emperors, the Apostle of Allāh had been given a divine name.¹⁸³ This is most suggestive, and would invite closer consideration, due attention being paid to the possibilities of anachronism and over-interpretation.

Some accused Muḥammad and his companions of ditheism, for all their vaunted belief in a unique deity, as they prayed to both al-Raḥmān and Allāh, prayer involving the invocation and adoration of both names. This ambiguity was put forward as the Circumstance of Revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) for the Qur'ānic command in the middle Meccan period, clearly a defensive one, that only one god should be worshipped, not two (Q, 16.50), along with leave that believers may invoke this polyonymous deity by the theonyms Allāh or al-Raḥmān indifferently (Q, 17.109), alongside the command that believers state that al-Raḥmān is their Rabb and that there is no God (*ilāh*) except for Him (Q, 13.30).¹⁸⁴ Al-Raḥmān and Allāh

¹⁷⁸ Seidensticker, 'Sources', 314. ¹⁷⁹ *US*, no. 225.

¹⁸⁰ Al-Ḥallāq (*Maslama*, 61) quotes poetry in which Musaylima was referred to as Raḥmān al-Yamāma. Barthold ('Musaylima', 497) held that al-Raḥmān was unknown in Mecca prior to Muḥammad, and one of Muḥammad's close associates, 'Abd 'Amr b. 'Awf, when he adopted the name 'Abd al-Raḥmān, found that this name was not always used to address him, being unfamiliar and unknown (TAB, 374).

¹⁸¹ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 17 n. 1. It might be pointed out that, according to what remains of Musaylima's revelation, which is of doubtful authenticity, occurrences of Allāh exceed those of al-Raḥmān.

¹⁸² On Musaylima's references to how visitations through revelation are delivered, see Eickelman, 'Musaylima', 42.

¹⁸³ Robin, 'Ḥimyar et Israël', 876. ¹⁸⁴ MbS, 2.377 f., 472, 555 f.; 3.79, 239.

were, for the purposes of the emergent Muḥammadan cult seeking clarity and distinctive self-definition, one deity in a developing monolatry.

What seems to have obtained in the case of al-Raḥmān was a situation in which the lord of the Meccan *ḥaram* was given this exotic name, and was countered to indigenous lords, to al-‘Uzzā of Banū ‘Abd Shams and other Quraysh whose cult was located at Nakhla, well outside Mecca, and to other deities as well, located outside the Meccan sanctuary and within. This outsider was made not only to give His name to the local guardian or guardians, but also to send down a revelation in Arabic (Q, 41.2–3). The exoticism of Muḥammad’s Lord accentuated this vexatious situation, and was a marker of distinctiveness. Exoticism in a fiercely and self-consciously parochial situation such as the Meccan tends to enforce claims to the extraordinary on behalf of religious agitators finding themselves in a situation of conflict and of ostracism – the story of opposition to Muḥammad, and his eventual flight to Medina followed by his ultimate vindication, is well known, and no useful purpose would be served by narrating it here.¹⁸⁵ Although narratives of this flight are highly telescoped and patterned,¹⁸⁶ in good measure according to the usual morphological and motifemic schemata common to folk-tales (and to Biblical narratives), there is no need on this score alone to discount their verisimilitude and their overall plausibility entirely.¹⁸⁷

That al-Raḥmān was eventually to be deprived of his primacy, ceding this ground to Allāh, should not be explained by supposing that the former was a foreign deity and the latter indigenous.¹⁸⁸ There seems indeed to have been an objection to worshipping al-Raḥmān among many Meccans, and the intensity with which He was invoked, worshipped and made to communicate may have contained elements of defensive over-reach. Allāh was certainly more exotic, but not wildly exotic, and safely distant from cultic practices near as well as far. Allāh had the distinct advantage of not having been anyone’s cultic deity. Moreover, in a rapidly evolving situation involving intensified rejection of Muḥammad’s claims and, correlatively,

¹⁸⁵ Rodinson (*Mohammed*, 97, 107) had already noted Muḥammad’s henotheism, the ambivalent character of his preaching at this stage, and his search for distinctiveness.

¹⁸⁶ The most convincing account of Muḥammad’s flight to Medina (the *hijra*, a term which does not occur in the Qur’ān), of his anathemisation in Mecca, of his reception in Medina and of the historiography of this series of events is that of Chabbi, *Seigneur*, ch. 8, *passim*, and 564–5 n. 376, 570–1 n. 97.

¹⁸⁷ The Aarne-Thompson scheme has been applied fruitfully, in restricted compass: Schwarzbaum, ‘Jewish and Moslem versions’, *passim* (on Q, 18.59 ff.); Dundes, *Fables*, 54 ff. (the legend of the seven sleepers, the theme of God’s justice and the motif of the speaking ant). More ample in scope is Dundes, *Holy Writ*.

¹⁸⁸ Thus, for instances, Jomier, ‘Divine name’, 200 ff., following al-Ṭabarī’s exegesis of Q, 17.110.

of an intensified crystallisation of Muḥammad's adherents and their conformation in what might qualify sociologically as a sect, a compelling distinctiveness could be lent to a vague Being by the accentuation of His distance.

The connotative expansion of divinity

There is no theology exclusive to al-Raḥmān, although there are Raḥmānist pericopes which, it has been maintained, contain a 'cycle of religious ideas'.¹⁸⁹ In fact, what we find is a body of thematic and connotative associations rather than distinctive ideas. Al-Raḥmān appears in connection with revelation, the Qur'ān, retribution and reward, omniscience, creation and veterotestamental prophets, and in a cosmocratic aspect, presiding from His Throne over the East and the West, over earth and the heavens.¹⁹⁰ The astonishing rapidity with which Muḥammad's betylic deity acquired the features of a cosmocratic, monotheistic god is testimony to the intensity of Paleo-Islam and to Muḥammad's alert and shrewd syncretistic genius, giving edges to his vigorous visionary capacity.¹⁹¹

In other words, we find that the actions and effects of al-Raḥmān were merging, both during the Meccan period in part of which al-Raḥmān was used as the primary proper name of the deity, and in the late Medinan period as well, when al-Raḥmān was used sparingly as the proper name of 'your God', *ilāhakum*, the unique and only God (Q, 2.163). Allāh and al-Raḥmān were to be homonymous and conceptually homologous, and ultimately to be identical. Both, or rather the one deity denominated as both, traversed the path between the unique betylic deity located in the Meccan sanctuary, initially with the character of an *ilāh* with jinnic characteristics, to that of what ultimately became the only deity with true claims to transcendent divinity. Allāh/al-Raḥmān is at once transcendent and celestial, and in the usual way resident in or at least with a presence in the Meccan sanctuary, which acts both as His extension and as His icon. This is reminiscent of the statement by the Biblical deity that Heaven was His Throne and the earth his foot-stool; we have seen how the Black Stone was identified as al-Raḥmān's Hand. A Paleo-Muslim inscription in

¹⁸⁹ Jomier, 'Divine name', 204 ff. ¹⁹⁰ Q, 20.5, 110; 43.82, 84; 55.1-15, 41-76; 78.37, and *passim*.

¹⁹¹ This view is in contrast to Chabbi's assertion that when Muḥammad designated his deity as *Rabb al-'ālamīn*, he intended this to mean that He was 'Lord of the tribes' (*Seigneur*, 618-19 n. 645). Clearly based on an abbreviated and truncated notion of Arab tribalism, and marring in its simple-mindedness an altogether especially perceptive book, this view has received a detailed critical discussion: Robin, Review of Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 19 f.

the Negev asserts that Allāhumma's Throne is in heaven, and the earth is where his foot rested.¹⁹² A tradition ascribed to Ibn 'Abbās well expresses this body of mutually permeable notions involving transcendence and presence, including iconic presence: he who had been unable personally and directly to pledge allegiance to Muḥammad might do so by touching the Black Stone, God's Right Hand, thereby expressing allegiance to God and His Messenger.¹⁹³

Thus Muḥammad's God acquired, apart from his concrete local presence and possibly betylic character, another, more ample character, one that gathered within itself all the actions that had previously characterised Arab divinities, both specialised ones and all-purpose ones, progressively construed according to Biblical and other templates. Ultimately, these devolved to a notion of universal sovereignty with an all-encompassing character,¹⁹⁴ clearly in the full flow of passage from a vague but decidedly animate and effective noumen, to an extensive, ubiquitous and connotative, but functional rather than abstract or fully mythological, concept of divinity.¹⁹⁵ This movement was expressed assertively rather than deliberatively, thereby underlining the primacy of the pragmatic and cultic moment at the commencement of Muḥammad's preaching.¹⁹⁶

For a historical appreciation of this matter, it would be inadvisable to expect, as is most often the case in modern scholarship, to find in the pre-theological Qur'ān with which we are here concerned a theological template modelled upon the *Leittheologie* that nineteenth- and twentieth-century Biblical theology believed held the Bible together, and which has generally oriented discussions of the Qur'ān: themes of salvation history and ideas of the covenant,¹⁹⁷ and monotheistic ideas of transcendence. The Qur'ān, and Muḥammad's teaching, was a process, not a definitive credal statement, increasingly, with time, informed by a sense of intense and all-encompassing divine activity unknown to Arab polytheism, but nevertheless emerging from it and using its concepts in a process, simultaneously, of incorporation

¹⁹² Isaiah, 66.1–2; Acts, 7.49; inscription MA 4254 (17), in Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads*, 378. See MbS, 2.20 f.; 3.272, 708 and Vitestam, 'Arsh'.

¹⁹³ Al-Fākihī, *Akhbār Makka*, 1, nos. 27 f.

¹⁹⁴ The various actions of this deity are most helpfully tabulated by Kassis, *Concordance*, s.v. 'Allah'. For a synoptic account of Qur'ānic doctrines, with a theological twist, see Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, ch. 9; for a connected account with due emphasis on myth, Beltz, *Mythen*, 43 ff.

¹⁹⁵ Thus we find that, in the main, early Qur'ānic exegesis uses what Muslim theology called attributes of action (*ṣifāt fi'l*) to gloss specific words and textual citations, and does not venture into general categories or address attributes of essence (*ṣifāt dhāt*): MbS, 4.68, 73, 89, 146, 183, 226, 237, 238, 285, 286, 305, and *passim*. More properly conceptual and categorical elaboration was to be one function of that second connotative expansion that was later to be found in Muslim theology.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Grimme, *Muhammad*, 2.25 f. ¹⁹⁷ Barton, 'Unity and diversity', 20 f.

and disengagement.¹⁹⁸ Biblical ideas, motifs and mythical elements were certainly present, albeit unsystematically. But one needs to take account of other elements, arising from ambient Arab conditions, and ideas circulating therein, whatever their origin. One needs to factor in the various epithets applied to divinities in the texts of ritual invocation (*talbiya*).¹⁹⁹ One would also need to acknowledge the various ways in which divinity is described in Arabic poetry, many of which have Qur'ānic concordances,²⁰⁰ most comprehensively in Umayya b. Abī al-Salt.²⁰¹

One of the mechanisms by which Allāh/al-Raḥmān acquired this all-encompassing character lies in the usual polytheistic manner of syncretistic, additive aggregation of names and epithets. Many of these same names and epithets applied to Allāh/al-Raḥmān had been applied to deities earlier – that some were not would lend itself to closer detailed study which is still to be done.²⁰² One of these Beatific Names, *al-asmā' al-ḥusnā* (Q, 7.180), al-'Azīz, occurring more frequently in the Qur'ān than al-Raḥmān (ninety-two times as against fifty-seven) was also deployed as a proper name, along with others, in the definite form (Q, 26.9, 69, 104, 122, 140, 175, 191, 217), almost as a refrain. These names, which later theology was to elaborate conceptually as Attributes, occur very frequently: syntactically as appositions, semantically as predicates, altogether constituting an integrative polyonymy which later gave occasion to considerable conceptual and theological ingenuity. These and other generic epithets for deities, which occasionally had been proper names as well, were brought into the increasingly exclusive ambit of Allāh/al-Raḥmān, crystallising a selection of ancient Arab names and epithets of divinity around Him,²⁰³ in a manner exceeding in its aggregative sway the epithets and names applied to Biblical divinities.²⁰⁴ As in the case of metaphors for the Christian God, this aggregation added considerably to His amplitude and to the range of His actions.

¹⁹⁸ See the comments of Birkeland, *Lord*, 5.

¹⁹⁹ Litanies of invocation also contain many of the names and attributes later applied to Allāh: Kister, 'Labbayka', Arabic texts, 50 ff.

²⁰⁰ Thus, almost at random, Qays b. al-Khaṭīm, *Dīwān*, 5.6 (Creator), the *mu'allaqāt* (in al-Tabrīzī, *Sharḥ*) of al-Ḥārith b. Ḥilliza (1.75: God's Knowledge), Zuhayr (lines 27 f.: God's Knowledge, a Book of Fate, the Day of Judgement, an avenging God) and 'Abīd b. al-Abrāṣ (line 20: God's Unicity).

²⁰¹ Umayya b. Abī al-Salt, *Dīwān*, 11.2 ff., contains a fairly comprehensive versified repertoire, but this particular poem may have been apocryphal, or at least have contained very extensive later interpolations – see also *ibid.*, 31.1, 83.1, 102.2–3, and *passim*, for motifs concordant with those of the Qur'ān. These motifs, and textual parallels between the poetry of Umayya and the Qur'ān, are listed in Frank-Kamenetzky, *Untersuchungen*, ch. 1, and discussed by Borg, 'Divine'.

²⁰² See the tally for South Arabian divine names and attributes in Moubarac, 'Noms', 364 ff. There is not, to my knowledge, a comparable study of North Arabian inscriptions.

²⁰³ Cf. Moubarac, 'Noms', 95; Chelhod, *Structures*, 104 f. ²⁰⁴ For instance, at 4 Ezra 7.62–70.

We have no way of knowing precisely what all the concrete elements of this syncretism were; understanding the nature of its mechanisms will depend on detailed reconstruction of the social groups involved. One example will suffice to underline the problem, and this is the case of the Qur'ānic *hapax legomenon* al-Ṣamad.²⁰⁵ Research on this epithet has until now 'only helped to increase our bewilderment'.²⁰⁶ It occurs in the Qur'ān together with *aḥad*, another *hapax legomenon* which has led to no perplexity.²⁰⁷ One may discern in the epithet al-Ṣamad traces of an older, cultic sense, which remains in fragmentary references to heave offerings that have already been discussed, whereby the yield of consecrated land was divided between the idol (*al-wathan*) and al-Ṣamad²⁰⁸ – the arrangement mentioned in the Qur'ān (Q, 6.136), speaking of a share for Allāh.²⁰⁹ In one pre-Islamic epic by the B. Asad, who belonged to Quraysh al-Bitāh and were reputedly descended from Quṣayy, the Lord addressed is given the epithet al-Ṣamad.²¹⁰ Al-Ṣamad occurs in the definite form, and the exegetical senses of compactness and solidity given to it later, often very colourfully anthropomorphic,²¹¹ have been seen, not altogether convincingly, to cede the way to traces of earlier, ritual uses of the term in connection with worship on high ground.²¹²

Closer textual and lexical-historical investigation maintains that, having lost an original intension, this term may have dissolved into secondary connotations used in the Qur'ān as an *epitheton ornans*, with a primarily

²⁰⁵ Rosenthal, 'Minor problems', 327 ff. This term yielded much exegetical confusion (*ibid.*, 337). See the discussion and the sources cited in Gilliot, 'Muqātil', 53 and 53 n. 66, and Rubin, 'Al-Ṣamad', 210 ff. It also aroused theological interest, on which see Gimaret, *Noms divins*, 320 ff. It might be noted that, proper names apart, the Qur'ān contains some 455 *hapax legomena*: Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 117. These are indicated by Bell throughout his *Commentary*, and are of course available in the *Mu'jam* of 'Abd al-Bāqī and that of Rūḥānī, in Kassis' *Concordance*, and similar works of reference. Statistical information about the incidence of Qur'ānic *hapax legomena* is given in Zammit, *Qur'ānic Arabic*, 586.

²⁰⁶ Van Ess, *Youthful God*, 4. For a critical review of the lexeme *ṣamad* in modern scholarship, see Ambros, 'Analyse', 220 ff. and *passim*, with healthy scepticism towards reliance on etymological procedures. There are no attested cognates in Semitic languages: Zammit, *Qur'ānic Arabic*, 258.

²⁰⁷ This was noted in *TG*, 4.367.

²⁰⁸ According to a rare tradition in al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, 3.47, using al-Ṣamad as a proper name, or at least in the definite form. This was already noted perceptively some centuries ago by Pococke, *Specimen Historiae*, 108 f. For another arrangement, see Mujāhid, *Tafsīr*, § 406. See overall, 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.186 ff.

²⁰⁹ Given what was said in note 2 above, it does not appear reasonable to use mention of Allāh's heave offerings as proof that it was He, rather than deities in general, that received them, as with Crone, 'Religion', 180.

²¹⁰ Kister, 'Labbayka', Arabic text, no. 35.

²¹¹ Van Ess, *Youthful God*, 3 ff.; *TG*, 1.361 f., 4.369 ff. This sense is reflected in the earliest Greek translations of the Qur'ān: Simelidis, 'Byzantine understanding'.

²¹² Rubin, 'Al-Ṣamad', 201 ff., and the critical comment of Ambros, 'Analyse', 237 ff.

formal, rhythmic rather than a semantic motivation in the Qur'ānic text.²¹³ That the term may betray traces of appeal to a multiplicity of unnamed deities with occasional cultic institutions or, like Allāhumma, epicletic address in extra-cultic situations among the polytheistic Arabs, would be a plausible interpretation. The whole argument has an unnecessarily mystifying air which is countervailed by available linguistic evidence from Arabic poetry, where al-Ṣamad appears quite simply as an *ism manqūl* that was a not uncommon term of exultation.²¹⁴

Many other Qur'ānic epithets for God are in general, as suggested, more easily traceable from those more commonly applied to a variety of deities throughout the region and over a long period of time. Be that as it may, the model of universal sovereignty, ideas of a celestial character or dwelling, the idea of a supreme or 'high' god (*hypsistos*, the Qur'ānic al-'Alī and the Biblical El 'Elyon), moving imperceptibly between higher and lower ground with celestial associations: these had antecedents recoverable from inscriptions spread sparsely but widely, most particularly but by no means only in areas within the ambit of late Roman Arabian religions.²¹⁵

There are elements of myths of creation throughout in the Qur'ān (Q, 41.9 ff.; 6.95 ff., 102). The cosmogonic accounts of the Qur'ān have conflicting chronological sequences, as noted already by an early exegete.²¹⁶ These differ in detail in some respects, including the number of days God needed to create heaven and earth, and the number of rest days He needed, differences that might be accounted for by revisions, interpolations and alterations or the vagaries of redaction; some may have been for rhythmical purposes. All this bears testimony to the fact that material from a variety of provenances was assimilated for a variety of purposes arising from the text's *Sitz im Leben*.²¹⁷ There is an anthropogeny which might be similarly characterised, offering different versions, separately and in combination, for which a number of chronological arrangements have been suggested.²¹⁸ There are likewise elements of an angelology and of a divine court (Q, 37.1–10, 54.11) that will come up later, and of regimes of reward and retribution which can be interpreted variously. There are visions of the Judgement,

²¹³ Ambros, 'Analyse', 241 ff., a view held in *TG*, 4.367 to be unproblematic.

²¹⁴ Khan, *Exegetischen Teile*, 215; Mujāhid, *Tafsīr*, § 2101 (but see also §§ 2012 f.); Abū Raḥma, 'Qirā'a', 119 ff.

²¹⁵ *RES*, nos. 2092, 2143, 2144, 2145 (all for a nameless god); *CIS*, nos. 537 ff. (for *Rḥmnn*); Winnett *et al.*, *Ancient Records*, no. 16 (Dadanitic inscription from al-'Ulā, claimed to be to the High God).

²¹⁶ MbS, 4.578. ²¹⁷ Bell, *Commentary*, 2.212, 214.

²¹⁸ Toelle, *Coran*, 215 ff., 224 ff., 230 ff.; Bell, *Commentary*, 2.150.

Resurrection, Paradise and Hell, each composed of pericopes with complex chronology and intertextual relations.²¹⁹

More mundanely, what in another setting would have been described as the contents of Pandora's Box are entirely at His disposal and discretion, to open and shut, to distribute singly or collectively, to allocate and withhold. But nowhere do these elements take the form of the autonomous and comprehensive narrative that they acquired in later commentarial traditions.²²⁰ Nevertheless, the divine profile that emerges ultimately and synoptically is in many crucial ways distinct from that of betylic and other deities which were open to forms of negotiation and reciprocity. Allāh/al-Raḥmān, albeit open to propitiation, is distinctly more authoritarian and determined, and beyond reciprocity.²²¹ Although Allāh as portrayed in the Qur'ān imposes a greater degree of regularity upon nature, His oft-invoked Signs, *āyāt*, He still remains unpredictable, and rules by arbitrary command, this being a token of his indivisible sovereignty.²²² He still acts as did Fortune among the pagan Arabs, and in certain instances takes over the attributes of Fortune, despite being counterposed to Fortune as its master.²²³ To claim that Allāh is also the god of fate would not be inaccurate,²²⁴ except that, with Him, Fate is expected to show regularity, and that, unlike the deities He came to supercede, his is, in principle, dependable.

These Signs betoken the cause of natural regularity and predictability that are conducive to human well-being. Such is *sunnat Allāh*, His 'modus operandi',²²⁵ whose regularity, continual vigilance with no moments of inattention²²⁶ and active maintenance of order would, to pagan eyes, have been counter-intuitive and would have required a serious leap of faith to carry any conviction. These Signs also betokened divine pleasure and displeasure, as they had conveyed betylic satisfaction and ire previously. The Qur'ān reminds Meccan recalcitrants that it was Allāh who had given

²¹⁹ See the synoptic accounts in 'Resurrection', 'Paradise' and 'Hell and hellfire', *EQ*.

²²⁰ See the comments of Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 209, and *Coran*, 96 f. For early mythological elaboration, see MbS, *passim*, and Wahb b. Munabbih, *al-Tījān*, 11 ff.

²²¹ Chabbi, *Coran*, pp. 88 ff., and *Seigneur*, 566–7 n. 383, on an interpretation of God's guile (*mukr*) in this perspective.

²²² On Allāh's *āyāt*, see Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 121 ff.; Izutsu, *God and Man*, 142 ff.; 'Signs', *EQ*. An anthropological interpretation *avant la lettre* of Allāh's arbitrariness was later offered by classical Muslim jurisprudence, in attempting to probe ritual, for instance the reasons for the imposition of exactly five daily prayers upon Muslims, or specific penalties for specific infractions, concluding that such arbitrariness was a token of sovereignty: for instance, Ibn Jinni, *al-Khaṣā'is*, 1.48; al-Shaṭībī, *al-I'tisām*, 2.129; al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā*, 1.39; Ibn Rushd, *al-Muqaddimāt*, 23; Ibn 'Aqīl, *al-Jadal*, § 42. Ibn Khaldūn (*al-Muqaddima*, 3.27) confirmed this by stating that devotions produce a *habitus* (*malaka*) of obedience to the object of worship.

²²³ Cf. Ringgren, *Fatalism*, 48; al-Raḥmūnī, *Mafhūm al-Dabr*, 124. ²²⁴ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 222.

²²⁵ Ansari, 'Juristic terminology', 261. ²²⁶ Q, 2.255 on Allāh: *lā ta'khubuhū sinatun*.

them security and prosperity in a situation of want (Q, 106.1–4). Yet it also tells its hearers that Signs are sent down to alarm and daunt (Q, 59.17), portents foreshadowing things to come, the *locus classicus* of which is perhaps heavenly prodigies, like the splitting of the moon, signalling the impending Hour of convulsions and calamities (Q, 54.1).²²⁷ Solar eclipses cause the Qurʾān to pronounce an incantatory formula of *taʿawwudh*.²²⁸ In all, we have a guileful Allāh who can, but does not of necessity, toy with humans in jinnic fashion, but does lead some astray at his discretion, when they deserve it:²²⁹ it might be noted that this image of Him comes across in polemical passages, and thus is not prominent in the first Meccan period when Muḥammad was still a Warner.²³⁰

Otherwise, the intention was to sway hearers, not to set up a vicarious doctrine of predestination.²³¹ It inserted the older idea of Fate, however unpredictable, into a register of providence, with regularity and mercy as instruments of divine pedagogy,²³² presided over by an uncanny and sublime power increasingly personified, with a purpose increasingly systemic.²³³ In those registers of the Qurʾān referring to chastisement, there is also the promise of reward which mitigates the bleakness of the older vision of the future registered in poetry,²³⁴ a promise which was to be expressed in terms of the salvific promise of paradise.

Unpredictability apart, Allāh was a deity who demanded forms of devotional drill arising from the recognition of power and terror before the majestic sublime, a sentiment combined with continuous recognition of a benign and ever-vigilant, yet nevertheless irascible and possibly also capricious divinity (*taqwā, tuqā*).²³⁵ Above all, this was a divinity unlike any other (Q, 42.11). He was a divinity who not only was unique, but whose divine sovereignty as expressed in His actions, and in His claims for Himself, was

²²⁷ See Bell, *Commentary*, 2.323.

²²⁸ The reference is to *ghāsiq* at Q, 113.3; al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina*, 2.57; al-Aynī, *ʿUmda*, 7.61 ff., 79 f.

²²⁹ Räsänen, *Divine Hardening*, 14 ff.; Birkeland, *Lord*, 128 f. It would be well to note that there is a long mythological history of divine guile and cunning, Allāh's *mukr*, this being one feature that allows the maintenance of divine sovereignty. As informed prudence and vigilant premeditation, Zeus' *metis* takes on the aspect of deceitful and guileful Time subdued, comparable to Allāh's appropriation of *dahr*. See Detienne and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence*, 11, 13 f., 20 f., 58, 67 f. and ch. 3, *passim*, for the mythological register.

²³⁰ Ettinghausen, *Polemik*, 11; Räsänen, *Divine Hardening*, 43.

²³¹ Räsänen, *Divine Hardening*, 8 ff., 42 f.

²³² It would be salient here to make reference to Weber's idea that Fate as an ethically neutral supra-divine power was congenial to military castes, while a more rational providence was more appropriate to bureaucracies (*Sociology*, 36 f.).

²³³ For the evolution of the Qurʾānic idea of destiny and its later developments, see Ringgren, *Fatalism*, chs. 3 and 4.

²³⁴ Neuwirth, 'Readings', 772 ff. ²³⁵ See the discussion of Ringgren, 'Gottesfurcht', 120 ff., 127 ff.

indivisible. His worship betokened the confession of his majestic uniqueness and His indivisible remit (Q, 7.73),²³⁶ an indivisibility connected to the ancient motif that the indivisibility of kingship is a guarantee of order, in His case of cosmic order (Q, 21.22). Needless to say, any derogation from uniqueness and exclusivity, any association with deities other than Himself, becomes the major element in miscreance, and is designated by the specific term *shirk*.²³⁷ Allāh being *ab initio* a cultic deity, *shirk* devolves to ritual sacrilege.²³⁸

Yet this indivisibility and uniqueness attributed to al-Rabb/al-Raḥmān/Allāh does not of necessity imply that He alone was divine throughout the Qur'ān's history. His exoticism underlined His uniqueness, but did not necessarily and always imply monotheism; the Qur'ān contains impulses and motifs that are undeniably monolatrous as distinct from monotheistic. The latter tended to gather force with time and, given political and social conflicts, to acquire increasing salience as Muḥammad's ministry progressed. The idea of one unique deity, rather than of a special and privileged deity, is absent from the earliest Meccan period. The conception of divine exclusivity starts to enter the history of the Qur'ān with the introduction of al-Raḥmān, with the increasing polarisation between al-Raḥmān/Allāh and local deities, be they called angels, *jinn* or simply deities, *ālīha*, especially in *sūra* 55 (al-Raḥmān).²³⁹ Decisive steps seem to have come with the Battle of Badr in AH 2,²⁴⁰ and with *sūra* 73 (al-Muzzammil) which Nöldeke placed before the categorical statements of *sūra* 53 (al-Najm), and Blachère thereafter, with the idea of exclusivity indicated early on in categorical form in *sūra* 112 (al-Ikhlāṣ). It has already been suggested that Muḥammad had been a man with a divided heart, active in a hostile environment, and may have had to atone for sacrilege. As a Meccan he had in the way expected sacrificed to al-'Uzzā, and quite likely to other deities as well.²⁴¹ It is little wonder that he needed to be reproved by his deity for his inattention, and that he needed to be encouraged and reassured, told that he had never been forsaken, and reminded of the good that his Lord had done him (Q, 80.1–10, 93.3–8, 94.1–8) – just as his Meccan adversaries needed to be reminded of what God had done for them.²⁴²

²³⁶ See the gloss of MbS, 2.46.

²³⁷ On which see Hawting, *Idolatry*, 21 f., 23 n. 8, with reservations about the author's view that the polemic against *shirk* is directed not at polytheists, but at Christians. Robin ('Filles de Dieu', 149) considers the religious disputes of Mecca to have been between monotheists and henotheists.

²³⁸ See Weber, *Sociology*, 264.

²³⁹ This history is outlined by Ju'ayt, *Sūra*, 2.194 ff., and Welch, 'Allah', 740 ff.

²⁴⁰ Welch, 'Allah', 744 ff., 753.

²⁴¹ See Wellhausen, *Reste*, 34 and Birkeland, *Lord*, 28 ff.

²⁴² Birkeland, *Lord*, 102 ff.

Clearly this history is by no means linear, and was, in the earlier period, jagged rather than cumulative, responding to a variety of communicative situations and constituencies and to their needs and constraints, as if probing limits and possibilities. It is a history that entailed many hesitations and tactical retreats, and a measure of cultic negotiation and diplomacy, most explicitly illustrated by the Satanic Verses. This was virtually the only major episode of negotiating the divine that has survived in detail, others being preserved in the historical or quasi-historical record, indicating traces of such negotiation and diplomacy in episodic form which, though it may or may not bear historical verisimilitude, yet does retain an indicative value salient to historical interpretation. It is not for nothing that a fractious Muḥammad, wishing to distinguish himself by the way he wore his hair, woven into four plaits during the conquest of Mecca,²⁴³ eventually returned to wearing it parted, after the manner of his adversaries.²⁴⁴

One such episode relates to Muḥammad having been enjoined by his aunts, just before his ministry, to attend rites before the obscure idol Buwāna, venerated by Quraysh, but being turned back by an angel.²⁴⁵ Another relates to an agreement Muḥammad concluded with Thaḳīf of al-Ṭāʾif much later, that they may preserve their sanctuary, and have a grace period of one year during which they may continue to worship Allāt, rejecting all the while their request that Her idol not be destroyed eventually, but also rejecting their proposal that they should have a period of grace before worshipping Muḥammad's deity.²⁴⁶ There is also the gloss on Q, 110.1–4, where Muḥammad needed to be commanded to tell his adversaries that he does not worship their deities. This occurred very shortly before Muḥammad's death and after he had obtained control of Mecca, when the Meccans, clearly building on the force of ancestral habit, still demanded mutual recognition and worship of respective deities.²⁴⁷

Most dramatic is the episode of the Satanic Verses, incongruous in the context of the later stylisation of Muḥammad's impeccable figure, causing later exegetes and historians much confusion.²⁴⁸ The episode revolves around a famous Qur'ānic passage from the *sūra* of al-Najm (Q, 53.18–23), in which Allāt, al-ʿUzzā, and Manāt were derided and declared to be mere names, with the scathing statement about how preposterous it was

²⁴³ WAQ, 868. ²⁴⁴ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.230. ²⁴⁵ SH, 1.179.

²⁴⁶ MbS, 2.542 ff; Krone, *al-Lāt*, 200 f.

²⁴⁷ SH, 1.430 – even after his conversion, Abū Sufyān still spoke of 'Muḥammad's God'.

²⁴⁸ SH, 1.458 ff.; Ju'ayt, *Sīra*, 2.73 ff., 272 ff. Even otherwise clear-sighted modern commentators display resistance to the veracity of this episode, with elaborate arguments that are nonetheless hardly convincing: Ju'ayt, *Sīra*, 2.275 ff.

to allocate to God three female offspring by people who desired only sons for themselves. The *sūra* of al-Najm is usually dated to a time in the early Meccan period, before the rejection of indigenous deities had entered the text of the Qurʾān, and before Muḥammad had requisite bargaining power; this chronology may be implausibly early on that score alone.²⁴⁹

Muslim traditions, very controversially, preserve a report in which the Qurʾānic text declared the three deities to be three cranes (*gharānīq*)²⁵⁰ to whom one may turn for interceding with Muḥammad's God, whereupon the Unbelievers prostrated themselves in prayer, together with Muḥammad and his companions, each party to his respective deity. Let it be remembered for the sake of clarity, and to avoid the pitfalls of an unnecessary assumption of subordinationism, that intercession, *shafā'a*, is modelled upon human relations, and that the person induced to plead for another need not be inferior to the person interceded with; pleading between the intercessor and the one interceded with is at its most effective when these two stand in a relation of parity.²⁵¹ Nevertheless, admitting the existence and cultic salience of other deities is usually interpreted as satanically inspired during a moment of prophetic inattention, an explanation supported by a late Medinan verse (Q, 22.52) which declares that Satan can and does inspire prophets, except that God will later correct the situation and abrogate the diabolically insinuated enunciation.²⁵²

What we have here is evidently the later Medinan emendation of an early Meccan verse, producing a reversal of sense, in line with the reconfiguration and recomposition of the supernatural world to which the Qurʾān bears witness,²⁵³ to be discussed below. Clearly, we have here Muḥammad's agreement to common worship with Quraysh of his deity along with Allāt,

²⁴⁹ It might also be noted that the notion of *shafā'a* associated with this episode entered the Qurʾān only in the late Meccan period; see Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 540 n. 309, 533–4 n. 288. In terms of political circumstances, the Satanic verses episode has been connected with the emigration of some of Muḥammad's followers to Ethiopia, the explanation for which is obscure, but which seems to have elicited a Qurayshi response in Ethiopia itself. See especially Nagel, *Mohammed*, 212 ff.

²⁵⁰ On the possible senses and associations of the term, see Fahd, *Panthéon*, 88 ff., Hawting, *Idolatry*, 147 f., and al-Damīrī, *al-Hayawān*, 2.221 f.

²⁵¹ *Shafā'a* has a semantic field that also includes prayer, and the *shuf'a* of sunset is a prayer with two prostrations: 'sh-f-', *LA*.

²⁵² MbS, 3.132, 680 f.; 4.162; *SII*, § 219. Even an exegete as strongly opposed to admitting the credibility of this story as al-Qurṭubī (*al-Jāmi'*, 12.79 ff.) does not discount the possibility that Satan may have exploited moments of Muḥammad's silence to insinuate locutions in line with the Prophet's (*ibid.*, 12.82 f.), despite his bitter criticism of al-Ṭabarī, who accepted the historicity of this event (TAB, 339 f.). On these social and political circumstances, see Wellhausen, 'Mohammedanism', 549, who suggests (at 549 n. 1) that Muḥammad was seeking a compromise with the Meccans, prepared to go so far as 'to take the edge from his monotheism'; Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 104 f.; Rodinson, *Mohammed*, 106 f.; Ahmed, *Satanic Verses*, 262 f.; Chabbi, *Coran*, 110 ff.

²⁵³ See the discussion of Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 219 and 540 n. 310.

al-‘Uzzā and Manāt, apparently on the customary basis of parity and mutual recognition by respective votaries. What lends this matter added credence is that what was involved was manifestly an attempt to construct a henotheistic subordinationism, possibly at the suggestion of Muḥammad,²⁵⁴ in a manner that may, on available evidence, have been novel in the Ḥijāz, but that might have been suggested by the model of cultic auxiliaries discussed in the previous chapter.

What is curious is the attribution to the Meccans of the belief that the three feminine deities were Allāh’s daughters. This was a late Meccan Qur’anic idea (Q, 16.57–8)²⁵⁵ which became standard in Muslim traditions and in modern scholarship as well. There is no known precedent for this unlikely belief in west and central Arabia.²⁵⁶ In all probability, it was a gesture by Muḥammad to support his diplomatic claim to subordinationism by proposing some form of divine filiation for polytheistic deities. An account by ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr relating that Wadd, Suwā‘, Yaghūth and Nasr were in fact only deified sons of Adam²⁵⁷ may reflect a similar way in which the worshippers of these deities sought to incorporate clan pre-Islamic cults into the emergent system, and this is neither unique nor unprecedented.²⁵⁸ That these daughters were referred to as cranes is not particularly odd. The Muslim tradition that has Muḥammad visited by angels in the shape of cranes²⁵⁹ is clearly one displacement among many, in which *jinn*, betylic deities and other supernatural beings transmogrified and shaded into one another without a clear and definitive taxonomy of the divine, and the association with birds is common. The same would apply

²⁵⁴ Wellhausen (‘Mohammedanism’, 546 n. 4) thinks it likely this was done at Meccan initiative.

²⁵⁵ Again, the Qur’an stresses the incongruity of attributing to God daughters on the part of those whose faces are darkened when they receive a female offspring. That the Qur’an states (Q, 6.100) that some had attributed to God daughters as well as sons may be hyperbole, or a reference to Christ or Ezra (Q, 9.30). The reading of a Kūfic graffito from the Qāra range, between Najrān and Qaryat al-Fāw, dating from the first Hijri century and allegedly stating that Allāh has no grandson, *ḥafid* (Grohmann, *Expedition*, 1, no. z 246), seems unjustified (M. Macdonald, personal communication), but remains enigmatic.

²⁵⁶ Watt (*Muhammad at Mecca*, 106) suggests that the word ‘daughters’ may have been used metaphorically, in line with other instances of its use in Arabic. However, Robin (‘Filles de Dieu’, 137 ff.) suggests, on epigraphic evidence, that the model would have been the South Arabian belief in daughters of ‘Il, beings that were institutionally undifferentiated and were not unlike angels, *jinn* and demons. ‘In (in some ways the cognate of al-Ilāh), as he indicates (at 124), was a deity who appeared in theophoric names only, with no dedications to his name. Moreover, he had disappeared sometime prior to the time of Muḥammad, having been replaced by *Rḥmnn*.

²⁵⁷ *US*, no. 1.

²⁵⁸ One might usefully recall the way in which Æthelwulf, the Anglo-Saxon king of Wessex (r. 839–856), had pagan divine genealogies reconfigured and blended with the Biblical genealogies in such a way that Woden and Jesus became virtually collateral cousins, and such as to affirm his assured kinship to both: Chaney, *Kingship*, 42, 46 f., 50 ff.

²⁵⁹ *SII*, § 34.

to elaborations of this figure of daughters in terms of wider poetical and iconographic associations.²⁶⁰ It might even be conjectured adventurously that this tradition preserves the memory of visitations to Muḥammad by one or all of these so-called daughters of Allāh. We have already seen that Muḥammad had a familiar *qarīn* called al-Abyaḍ, and the Qurʾān does state that every man has a familiar who will bear witness to his or her deeds at the end of time (Q, 50.23). The Prophet is also said, on the authority of ʿĀʾisha, to have told her that he had a *shayṭān* who, with the help of God, became a Muslim²⁶¹ – on poetic evidence, a good *qarīn* can also reform the character of a man.²⁶²

That these deities were also referred to in the Qurʾān as angels, *malāʾika* (Q, 19.86, 20.108, 43.19, 53.19, 20, 21, 27) in the middle and later Meccan periods²⁶³ is not particularly odd, not least because angelisation and demonisation are the standard means for the demotion, but not elimination, of multiple deities in an emergent monolatry, which always operates by categorical shifts in the economy of the supernatural. In a horizontal move, Paleo-Muslim poetry in Medina witnessed a replacement of *jinn* by angels.²⁶⁴ We have already encountered demonisation in the context of the development of Christianity, and this matter was noted for the development of Islam long ago,²⁶⁵ which may be noted together with the functional elevation of angels to the status of deities.²⁶⁶ The Qurʾān (Q, 37.1–2) does make an oath by angels (*ṣāffāt*, *zājirāt*),²⁶⁷ but believers are nevertheless enjoined to swear by Allāh (Q, 16.38, 35.42).

Space, time and divinity reconfigured

The subordination of multiple divinities to the supreme deity involved two major movements, the one conceptual and the other practical, at once cultic and social. The latter involved cultic centralisation by an emergent, exclusive cultic association, with cultic worship being directed to the one supreme being to the exclusion of others. Allied with this latter was the conceptual movement expressed in the connotative and conceptual expansion of Allāh, as he moved on from the preternatural world to create the space for conceiving the supernatural realm. This involved centrally the

²⁶⁰ Montgomery, 'Empty Hijāz', 88 ff. ²⁶¹ US, no. 411.

²⁶² Al-Tabrizi, *Sharḥ*, 144, with reference to Labid b. Rabīʿa.

²⁶³ Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 222 f., 545 n. 320. ²⁶⁴ Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 47 ff.

²⁶⁵ Goldziher, *Abhandlungen*, 1.111 ff.; Grimme, *Muhammad*, 2.66.

²⁶⁶ It might be noted that there is epigraphic evidence for Zeus himself being designated as *angelos*, a matter attributed to Syrian influence: RAC, 'Engel, 1', § A.III.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Bell, *Commentary*, 2.149. On angel worship in the Qurʾān, see Eichler, *Dschinn*, 97 ff.

recasting of categories of the supernatural and divine, and the reclassification of their members. This classification moved from the relative parity, commensurability, porosity of borders, and translatability or at least mutual recognisability of divinities known to polytheism, be they called *rabb*, *ilāh*, *jinni* or *mal'ak*, all of which might have been regarded indifferently as *daemones* and *theoi* by the ancient Greeks, to a hierarchy within the supernatural realm. This categorical reconfiguration of the preternatural and the conceptual incipience of the supernatural yielded a ranking which, in the standard henotheistic manner, set up an instance in the divine world to which other categories of the supernatural were subordinated. Muslim traditions speak of Muḥammad instructing 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and Abū Bakr that, upon their conversion, they are expected to disavow *al-andād*, Allāh's associates,²⁶⁸ that is to say, not to fall into *shirk*, associationism.

This formed a constituent part of the eventual move from a combined scheme of monolatry and henotheism, the former cultic and the latter conceptual, to monotheism. We witness here, in standard manner, categories of certain supernatural beings not only demoted in rank, efficacy and energy, but also made to submit to the supreme deity, now declared uniquely divine, all the while preserving for these other beings a supernatural status as actors, while being removed from the category of divinity, now dissolved as a general category and become the descriptive characteristic of one supreme being: only Allāh was to remain divine, the others uncanny and preternatural, or otherwise (and this applies to angels) belonging to a derivative, secondary order of sublimity. This also involved on occasion the denial and indeed the extirpation of some erstwhile divinities: in the case of Muḥammad, we see clearly a double movement whereby deities properly so called, the *āliha* or *arbāb*, were declared to be chimerical and ineffectual, and eventually had their cults extirpated, while those supernatural beings whose worship, veneration or propitiation did not have a cultic infrastructure – *jinn* and angels, and devils as well – were not denied, but were Islamised and made to be subservient to and created by the supreme being.²⁶⁹

This pairing of cultic restrictiveness and exclusivity with a measure of conceptual permissiveness in the understanding of supernatural categories was noted by an early exegete. Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 767) spoke suggestively of 'al-shirk fi ṭ-ṭā'a, dūn^a 'ibāda',²⁷⁰ associationism of obedience,

²⁶⁸ *III*, §§ 177, 223. This command is repeated in the Qur'ān: Q. 2.22, 165; 14.30; 34.33; 39.8; 41.9.

²⁶⁹ Again, this is a ubiquitous phenomenon. In Job 1–2, for instance, we see Satan acting under divine authority.

²⁷⁰ MbS, 2.80.

not of worship, taking note of the plurality of supernatural potencies in a subordinationist economy of the supernatural. Allāh remains the only recipient of formal worship, the others remaining in their own ways superordinate in relation to humankind, some venerated (angels), others feared and mistrusted (devils) and yet others (*jinn*) falling somewhere in between.

Cultic space and time

These and other theological interpretations appear early on to be glosses on an actual religious situation. For the exotic al-Raḥmān/Allāh to acquire a position of clear primacy which was not only notional and fanciful, but also socially and politically compelling, He had to acquire a firm and durable implantation, ultimately exclusive, in sacred territory, and to control sacred time. By all accounts and indices, the territory was the Meccan sanctuary around the Ka'ba, centred on the Black Stone wherein a noumen resided, as has been suggested. Durability and the acquisition of a socially and politically compelling, ultimately an exclusive situation, was to be acquired by political, diplomatic and military means during Muḥammad's lifetime, and to be definitively consolidated thereafter.

We have seen that an exotic deity was brought in to occupy a central location, the Ka'ba, which appears to have been a location of divine assembly attached to a number of cultic associations. The location was itself animated by a noumen inhabiting a betyl, whose effects were, with the development of Muḥammad's religion, to become progressively more diffused as celestial and betylic bilocation, and ultimately omnilocution. This came with the connotative expansion of God, and occurred at a time when a chief deity of the Meccans had resided elsewhere, three days' journey away at Nakhla.²⁷¹ A recent reconstruction of cultic locations in and around Mecca, of possible ritual itineraries and circuits in the region overall, and of the general topographic layout, reveals a number of interesting features which sustain the arguments being developed here.²⁷²

The expansion of cultic territory beyond the centre of Mecca, the spatial dispersion of the Rabb's cultic energies and the appropriation of sacred

²⁷¹ Robin ('Filles de Dieu', 155) emphasises the plurality of Meccan deities, with Isāf, Nā'ila, Manāf and Hubal – to which one might add Buwāna and others, asserting that Allāh had already been the deity of the Ḥums in the Meccan sanctuary. Pavlovich ('*Qad kunnā*', 70) suggests, implausibly in view of foregoing discussions, that Hubal was promoted from the status of *ilāh* to *al-ilāh*, and that he may even have been called Allāh.

²⁷² Chabbi, *Seigneur*, chs. 10 and 12, *passim*.

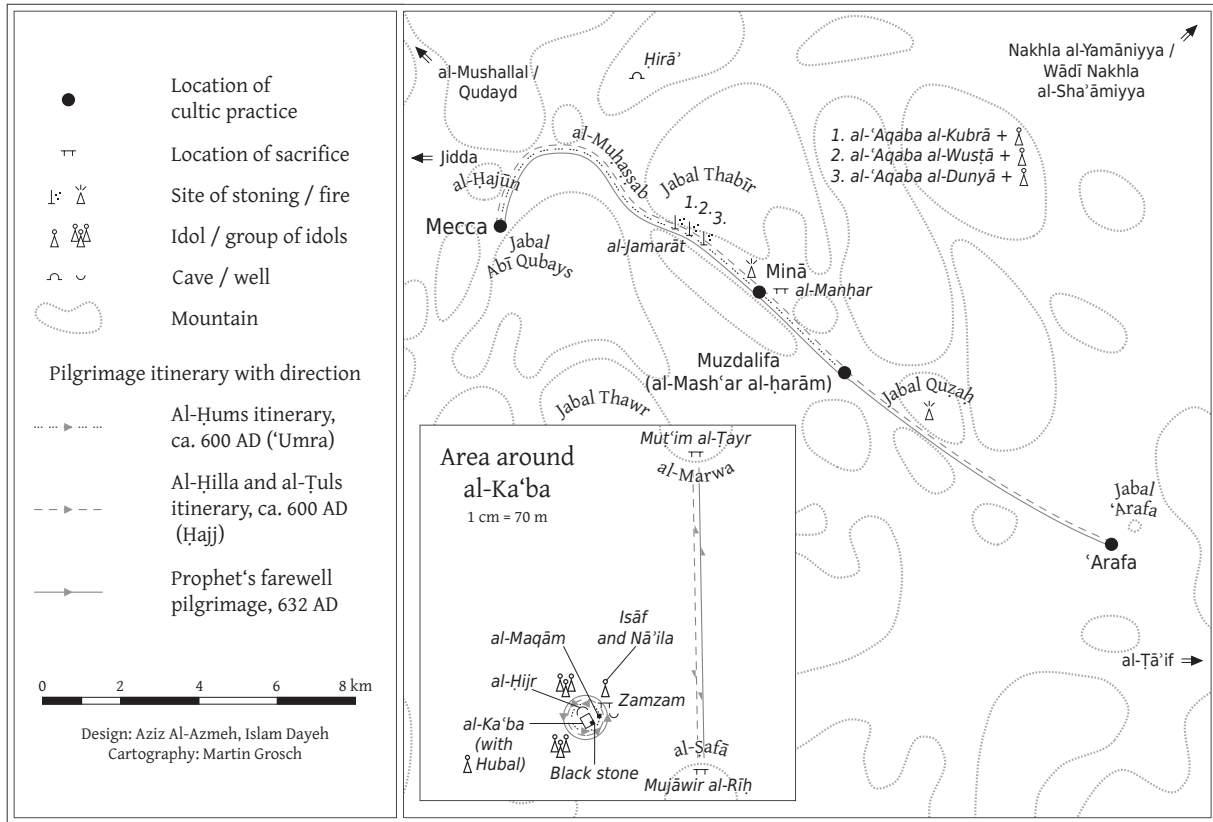
space by Paleo-Islam, ultimately exclusively, and by their Lord, ultimately the exclusive object of cult, took place in terms of a reorganisation of Meccan pilgrimages. Muḥammad not only insisted on pilgrimage to Mecca, largely in pagan terms in which the reconfiguration of Meccan pilgrimage took place, a reconfiguration that was not brought to the agenda of Muḥammad's activities in Medina prior to al-Ḥudaybiyya in AH 6,²⁷³ as the new deity's socio-political armature was still under construction. The Meccan Ka'ba was identified as the *qibla*, the direction of prayer: it has been perceptively and plausibly suggested that the date of this change had been retrojected by later Muslim traditions to the early days in Medina, and that the adoption of this particular spot as the *axis mundi* is more likely to have been a further gesture, of diplomatic import, arising from the context of the al-Ḥudaybiyya negotiations.²⁷⁴ The reconfiguration of the Meccan pilgrimage rites is represented on Map 4.

It has already been noted that the *hajj* and the *ʿumra* were two separate rituals, involving two separate itineraries and social constituencies, and two separate dates in the ritual calendar. The *hajj* appears to have taken place mainly outside the Meccan sacred precinct, centring on sacrifices at Minā some 10 km to the east, and associated with market activity, notably at Dhū'l-Majāz. The Ḥumṣ cultic association, among whom Muḥammad was counted, did not venture in their rites beyond al-Muzdalifa. There appear to be early signs of Muḥammad's dissatisfaction with this situation, as he is reported to have participated in the extra-Meccan *hajj* to 'Arafa.²⁷⁵ Muḥammad's farewell sermon in the year AH 9, very shortly before his death, was delivered at a point which formed part of this extra-Meccan *hajj* circuit, at the peak of Mount 'Arafa, declared by God to be a point from which procession had been made by 'the people', and from which Paleo-Muslims should also start a procession, mentioning Allāh and asking his forgiveness (Q, 2.198 f.). By the end of his ministry, and after his mastery over Mecca had been assured, Muḥammad amalgamated the two separate rites, making a variety of adjustments in the ritual circuits involved, incumbent first upon those of his followers who were allowed into Mecca, later upon all pilgrims, the overall import of which was uniformity and central control.²⁷⁶

²⁷³ This issue is noted by Donner, *Muhammad*, 65. ²⁷⁴ Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 413.

²⁷⁵ This was also noted by Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 598 n. 536.

²⁷⁶ WAQ, 1077 f., provides details of ritual locations and times observed during a *hajj* ceremony performed under the leadership of Abū Bakr, when Muḥammad was still not permitted to enter the region of Mecca. It was then that the *sūra* of Barā'a, disallowing polytheists from participating in the pilgrimage, was pronounced publicly, reputedly by 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.

Map 4 Pilgrimage at Mecca, *c.* 600, 632

These adjustments and amalgamations²⁷⁷ involved such matters as the introduction of circumambulating the Ka'ba (*tawāf*) as an obligatory integral part of the *ḥajj*, performed at the beginning and at the end of the season, when it had been a component of the *'umra*;²⁷⁸ the integration of the sevenfold *sa'ī* procession between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa; and decommisioning al-Marwa as a sacrificial site.²⁷⁹ This was a process which started after the Peace of Ḥudaybiyya, supplemented by the definitive ban on the participation by polytheists in the rites of pilgrimage (Q, 9.16–17), except under special treaty conditions or other dispensation.²⁸⁰ The whole new scheme was given practical and symbolic expression in Muḥammad's Farewell Pilgrimage.²⁸¹ This was the beginning and not the end of this amalgamation which was to continue beyond Muḥammad's lifetime, expressed, for instance, in the persisting preference for the month of Rajab, now entirely subject to the lunar calendar, as the time for *'umra*.²⁸²

This amalgamation of rites performed in the Meccan cultic cluster was not a fusion, but an association of two separate rites under a unified signature and expanded and consolidated Meccan sacred territory. The two rites might be performed singly (*ifrād*), in interrupted sequence (*tamattu'*) involving ritual sacralisation (*iḥrām*)/desacralisation (*iḥlāl*)/resacralisation, or in continuous sequence (*qirān*), bearing in mind that sacralisation involved a state of ritual purity for the pilgrim, with attendant attire, and that desacralisation followed the sacrifice of hair and of animals, at least initially – so, at least, were the procedures as they crystallised eventually. Whether or not Muḥammad himself performed a single or a combined pilgrimage is a matter of disagreement in the sources,²⁸³ and later reports reflect indeterminacy and experimentation by Muḥammad and his followers. Why no complete fusion was made is a matter that deserves further investigation, and is most likely to be connected with considerations of

²⁷⁷ The most detailed account is given by Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Pèlerinage*, 306 ff. and ch. ix, *passim*. Ample details are given by al-Aynī, *'Umda*, 9.195 ff., in light of later Muslim developments but preserving important early material. For a convenient brief account of Muslim Meccan pilgrimage in classical form, see von Grunebaum, *Festivals*, 27 ff., with discussion of changes made to the pagan pilgrimage.

²⁷⁸ This has long been noted: Wellhausen, *Reste*, 67, 74, 141.

²⁷⁹ Along with this was introduced a change in sacrificial vocabulary, with *ḥadī* giving way to *ḍaḥīyya*, the latter term possibly designating also a change of timing of sacrificial offering, moving from pre-dawn to dawn: Chelhod, *Sacrifice*, 49 ff. Cf. 'Umra', *El*. It has been suggested (Wellhausen, *Reste*, 93 f.; Robertson Smith, *Religion*, 227 f.) that this was the sacrifice of a first-born lamb, but this is uncertain.

²⁸⁰ WAQ, 1078. See also 'Hadjdj', *El*. ²⁸¹ On which see Rubin, 'Great pilgrimage'.

²⁸² In AH 56, Mu'āwiya is reported to have performed the *'umra* in Rajab: TAB, 993.

²⁸³ See the characteristically crisp statement in al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārikh*, 2.109. These disagreements seem to reflect a confusion in the reckoning and naming of Arab months. See al-Sa'fī, *al-Qurbān*, 235.

social constituencies: their distinctiveness was still preserved in one variant of the Qurʾān, that of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.²⁸⁴

Grounds proximate to the Meccan *ḥaram* were appropriated on behalf of the Rabb of the Kaʿba, and included the incorporation of the site known as Maqām Ibrāhīm which had been used by Muḥammad as a direction for prayer, or possibly as a site for prayer.²⁸⁵ During his Farewell Pilgrimage, Muḥammad declared not only the peak of Mount ʿArafa to be a *mawqif*, but the entire surrounding area; similarly, he declared that it was not only Mount Quzah that was a *mawqif*, but the whole of the Muzdalifa area.²⁸⁶ One could interpret this distension of ritual locations as a devitalisation of specific betylic locations. Cultic centralisation was the objective, if now in a broader and consolidated area. This devitalisation was complemented by a devaluation of animal sacrifice;²⁸⁷ God will receive neither their flesh nor their blood (Q, 22.37), and erstwhile deities to whom sacrifice had been offered did not, as a result, proffer help to their votaries (Q, 46.27). This is in line with the devaluation of blood sacrifice in Late Antiquity overall, and is underlined by the slight disrespect reported of Muḥammad to sacrificial animals, having allegedly suggested to a man that he mount such an animal,²⁸⁸ and by the Abrahamising sublimation of sacrifice. Ultimately, animals dedicated to the *ʿumra* were now dedicated to the *ḥajj*, and the location of sacrifice, during Muḥammad's Farewell Pilgrimage, took place at Minā, although the Prophet declared, on a previous occasion, that all of Mecca's ravines were sacrificial locations.²⁸⁹ Sacrifice was no longer to be a constituent component of pilgrimage, becoming an elective rite that could even be substituted by fasting,²⁹⁰ further neutralising the sacrality of erstwhile sacrificial sites and rites crucial to polytheism.

The disturbance and reconfiguration of the system of ritual space was complemented and sustained by the derangement of cultic time. This is a promising perspective from which one might regard Muḥammad's abolition of intercalation discussed above, in the year 9 or 10 of the Hijra, a matter which, though frequently noted, has not hitherto received deliberate attention. This action had the effect of disengaging the rhythms of cult from those of nature, which had previously governed the calendric rhythms

²⁸⁴ Hamdan, *Kanonisierung*, 297. ²⁸⁵ 'Maqām Ibrāhīm', *El*, and WAQ, 832. ²⁸⁶ *SIH*, 4.187.

²⁸⁷ See the translation of, and commentary upon, Qurʾānic verses relating to sacrifice, in chronological sequence, and considerations of this in relation to Muḥammad's alimentary prohibitions, in Gräf, *Jagdbeute*, 9 ff.

²⁸⁸ Hammām b. Munabbih, *Ṣaḥīfā*, Arabic text, no. 11.

²⁸⁹ WAQ, 736. See the discussion of al-Saʿfī (*al-Qurbān*, 15, 236 f.), who also (at 157) discusses the profound ambivalence of later Muslim traditions to sacrifice.

²⁹⁰ Al-Saʿfī, *al-Qurbān*, 238.

of *‘umra* and *hajj* in spring and autumn. It discomported the association of seasonal movements dependent on the synchronised rhythms of transhumance (and associated markets) with pilgrimage, making them subject to a lunar calendar that was independent of the seasons, and thereby disengaging the rhythms of nature from those willed by God's preference for a purely lunar, asynchronic calendar.

The subversion of a hitherto regnant cultic calendar²⁹¹ dependent on natural rhythms of seasonal transhumance, and its replacement by a different, elective and deliberate, and ultimately political manner of the division of time, subjected time to what will have appeared an arbitrary prescription. Such is the defining feature of this revolutionary step towards cultic centralisation.²⁹² The disengagement of the time of cult from the natural rhythms of transhumance and trade, in effect, also disengaged the new religion of Allāh from the rhythms by which previous cultic practices were governed, and abstracted religion from any given set of social and political relations embodied in cultic associations, making them subject to a new, somewhat abstract (and to this extent operationally rational) political instance and a new cultic association.²⁹³ After all, God had made the year consist of twelve months (Q, 9.36), which may not be tampered with by intercalation that shifts the sequence of months to accommodate the solar

²⁹¹ In the transition from primitive Christianity to the Christianity of the Church, a similar shift occurred in the cultic calendar towards the end of the second century. This was reflected in a controversy, continuing for some centuries, over the date of Easter, from older practices in step with the Jewish Passover to new regimes, devised by a number of churchmen, which ultimately prevailed: Eusebius, *History of the Church*, v.23 ff. The development was slow, complicated by regional and sectarian differences, its context that of communal differentiation (Sizgorich, *Violence*, 51 f.), and only with the third century did Sunday gradually begin to become fixed for Easter, with the gradual disengagement of the Christian calendar from the Jewish 15 Nisan, with disputes continuing, including disputes of a technical nature connected to lunar-solar calendric computations. The will of the emperor himself at the Council of Nicaea did not ensure a uniform solution apart from the decision to become independent of the Jewish ritual calendar (Huber, *Passa und Ostern*, 45 ff., 61 ff.; Declercq, *Anno Domini*, 52, 54 ff., 72 ff.). It must be stressed, however, that the dispute involved not chronology alone but a set of other ritual matters: see Richardson, 'Quartodecimal riddle'. Similarly, the Qumran community divided itself from mainstream Judaism by adopting a complex solar calendar punctuated by agricultural festivals: see Scrolls 4Q320–330 and 4Q317 in Vermes, *Scrolls*, 347 ff. and Neusner, 'Doctrine', 242 f. Anthropological study of the introduction of the Muslim calendar into the western Sudan ruled by Islamised lineages shows no evidence of such subversion, for which there would have been no call, but rather the use of the Hijri calendar to punctuate 'the political year', the rest being left to solar or seasonal cycles: Goody, *Interface*, 136, 132 ff. Finally, it might be noted that, in Chinese history, the acceptance of the imperial calendar by the local notability signalled their fealty to the emperor: Needham, 'Time', 232.

²⁹² This point had already been intuited in 1859 by Sprenger ('Kalender', 144) with reference to rhythms of trade, later underlined by Rodinson ('Lune', 166 f., and 'Espace', 69 ff.) and noted by Rubin ('Great pilgrimage', 233). The confluence of the calendric, the economic and the social in synchronisation was noted a millennium ago by al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār*, 291.

²⁹³ 'Months', *EQ*, 3.412, speaks of the assertion of a new identity.

calendar of the *hajj* (Q, 2.197).²⁹⁴ In contrast, Muḥammad's new chronological regime introduced a system of time based on a discrete number (*ḥisbān*) arising from natural regularity, independent of social manipulation or social embeddedness.²⁹⁵

Thus the coordinates of cult were redefined, by the centralisation of the spatial and temporal configurations, from cults offered at a variety of places to one consolidated cultic space in which the new deity was accessible; some specifications of place, such as Mount Quzah, were removed, but the entire area of Mecca and its environs was reconstituted and, with the exception of the Ka'ba and its Black Stone, homogenised. As we saw, this was a bivalent move, for the Rabb animating the Black Stone also became translocal and indeed omnilocal, ultimately transcending His residence, Mecca and indeed Arabia altogether. The move was one from cults offered at a variety of times, to one cult whose temporal coordinates were now fixed in a manner that was uniform, against nature, subject to the wish of the One God. This was a move at a strategic point touching upon the whole system governed by temporal rhythms of alliances, truces, cults, cultic associations, and the forms of control they entailed. What this betokened was the superimposition of a new political authority and a correlative cultic association centred around Allāh with the claim and capacity for command, over time, and over the social relations of command and organisation that existed, expressed in erstwhile cultic associations, from which had previously emerged the plurality of deities and the rhythms of their worship.

Correlative with this force of cultic command, and completing the process with a systemic thoroughness, were mythical-genealogical claims made for it, overriding and antedating the cultic arrangements that had hitherto been in place. After all, Muḥammad's movement was one of refoundation, restoring a *primaeval* condition, which made the solicitation of Abraham as Muḥammad's and the Ka'ba's forefather, and the forefather of the new religion, a proper myth of origin.²⁹⁶ That the occurrence in the Qur'ān of Abraham's name pre-dated the late Meccan period, as is claimed by Muslim traditions, should not be taken for granted, and most likely belongs to the later Islamisation of material concerning Mecca and its history.²⁹⁷ Abraham became a Meccan citizen only while Muḥammad was

²⁹⁴ See the pronouncement of Muḥammad in his Farewell Oration in *SIH*, 4.185, and Mujāhid, *Tafsīr*, §§ 93, 549.

²⁹⁵ Cf. Tamer, *Zeit*, 207, who makes a similar point.

²⁹⁶ Al-Sa'fi, *al-Qurbān*, 68 ff., with comparative material.

²⁹⁷ On this Islamisation: Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 588–9 n. 477. On the Abraham–Ishmael legends in connection with the Ka'ba, see Firestone, *Journeys*, 80 ff., 94 ff.

in Medina, as if by an impulse of irredentism, and came to fulfil the role that Moses had had for Muḥammad at Mecca as reflected in the Qur'ān.²⁹⁸ The Qur'ānic Abraham pericopes can be seen as an exemplary case for the study of Qur'ānic chronology, especially of the later Qur'ānic rereading and interpretation of earlier verses.²⁹⁹ In the Meccan Qur'ān it was Moses, not Abraham, who was the principal veterotestamental character. Ishmael was in this period, and was to remain, a transient character, almost a side-kick; early on in the Qur'ān, he was not closely associated with Abraham.³⁰⁰ Hagar is entirely absent from the Qur'ān.³⁰¹ Only later did Abraham come to prominence, and to be construed as the founder of the Ka'ba – later, but nevertheless indicative that the process of circulating Ka'ba-related myths was very early. Clearly, Biblical characters were appropriated from material circulating in Arabia at first or second hand. But this does not justify the common ascription of a veterotestamental base.³⁰²

The Meccan cultic site was being redeployed on behalf of a new deity, whose exoticism was reinforced by the exoticism of unfamiliar or only barely familiar figures being made to run along with the indigenously Qurayshi genealogy. Genealogical registers and elements were reorganised and recast in multiple and ultimately convergent lines, in a manner that was associated and coeval with an increasing Biblicisation of the way in which Muḥammad's commission was being expressed and scripturalised as his revelation developed. Doubtless this is also reflected in the Biblicising redaction of whatever murals and other pictorial representations were to be seen inside the Ka'ba when Muḥammad eventually took over Mecca.

The fullest ekphrasis of murals and other plastic representations on the inner pillars (or sides) of the Ka'ba is by al-Mas'ūdī, and contains somewhat more detail than the reports of al-Azraqī and Ibn Hishām.³⁰³ Al-Mas'ūdī's

²⁹⁸ Bell, *Origins*, 125, 130. ²⁹⁹ Chabbi, *Coran*, 257, 368, and chs. ix and xiii, *passim*.

³⁰⁰ See Bell, *Commentary*, 2.174; Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 119.

³⁰¹ Overall: Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 322, 400; *Coran*, 55 ff.

³⁰² In view of arguments in the previous chapter, it would be well to note that veterotestamental names in the Qur'ān, like Isma'il (Ishmael) Ishāq (Isaac), Yūnus (Jonas) and Ilyās (Elijah), occur in forms that have no Hebrew base, but rather derive from Greek forms mediated through Syriac and, perhaps, Ge'ez: Ahrens, 'Christliches', 176 f. The later construal of Meccan Abrahamism as *primaeva*, and of Abraham and Ishmael as the builders of the Ka'ba and the founders of the pilgrimage rites, with Hagar instituting the *sa'ī* between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa, appears to be related to the construal of Ḥanīfism as a proto-Islam (Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 311, 398). Yet this appears in fact to have been slowly and fitfully developed during the lifetime of Muḥammad, as distant historical and legendary figures were being indigenised, although this trope was to flourish luxuriantly in later Muslim traditions, using much Old Testament and other Jewish material.

³⁰³ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, § 1454; al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 110 ff. (which contains other valuable detail); *SIH*, 4.41. See also *SH*, 3.125. These accounts seem to go back to an earlier common source, or perhaps a number of separate reports, clearly abbreviated by the earlier and more pious account of al-Azraqī.

ekphrasis reports a representation of Abraham holding the divination sticks of Hubal (*al-azlām*), and another of Ishmael, mounted on horseback, presiding over the pilgrims proceeding from 'Arafa to al-Muzdalifa (*ijāza, ifāda*), in addition to a person termed al-Fārūq distributing food among the pilgrims. We have no way of knowing if these representations were narrative, hieratic or both. But what we can say is that they have been overlaid by interpretative glosses. It is unlikely that there was a representation of Abraham carrying Hubal's divination sticks, and the reference may well have been to a representation of Hubal;³⁰⁴ it is unlikely that Abraham appeared at all,³⁰⁵ although note needs to be taken of the possibility that a renaming of the figures depicted may have been introduced briefly amid the uncertainties and ambiguities that marked the earliest history of Paleo-Islam. The *ifāda* described in the sources, in this most sacred of Ḥums locations, is not likely to have been from 'Arafa, for reasons that have been made clear.

Alongside Abraham, Ishmael and al-Fārūq there were, according to al-Mas'ūdī's ekphrasis, some sixty pictorial images of Qusayy and other Meccan, Qurayshi grandees, the aetiological hero and other ancestral heroes, possibly representing various sections of Quraysh, each represented alongside the image of a deity, and possibly of persons who were guardians of the Ka'ba, its human *arbāb*. In addition, there was a representation of Mary with her baby Jesus, along with angels and trees. The existence of murals or other pictorial representations of persons in Mecca is not extraordinary. At Qaryat al-Fāw were found murals depicting, among other things, what may well be the leading grandees.³⁰⁶ Ancient Arabic poetry also bears such testimony, including a reference to pictorial representations inside an unidentified Ka'ba.³⁰⁷

While figures of Qurayshi grandees may not be surprising, the figure of a person designated as al-Fārūq is difficult to interpret, if one were indeed to

Nevertheless, the report retains an archaic flavour. The vagaries of these reports are discussed from an *isnād*-critical perspective by Bashear, 'Images'. Modern scholarship has been oddly incurious about this matter – it had already been discussed in some detail several centuries ago by Pococke, *Specimen Historiae*, 96 f. On the few occasions when these reports were noted, they were taken at face value, and mentioned without comment. See for instance Creswell, *Architecture*, 2 f.; Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 392; Rubin, 'Ka'ba', 104.

³⁰⁴ Lenormant ('Culte payen', 339) suggests that Hubal became Abraham.

³⁰⁵ Rubin ('Ḥanifiyya', 288) seems to take these reports at face value, and sees in them, in a manner conforming to the classical Muslim interpretations, evidence of a pre-Muḥammadan Abrahamism 'Ḥanifism'.

³⁰⁶ Al-Anārī, *Qaryat al-Fāw*, 20, 85 no. 4.

³⁰⁷ *Al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, 26.70–2 ('Abdāh b. al-Ṭabīb, d. c. 625). Pictorial representations inside sanctuaries are attested as far back as the Old Testament, where figural decoration of the sanctum is ascribed to Solomon (1 Kings 7.23–8).

accept that there was actually such a figure. It is not very likely that this was a reference to 'Umar, whose designation as al-Farūq is of later vintage.³⁰⁸ But this cannot be excluded altogether, especially if one were to be sceptical about accounts relating to the immediate effacement of these images on the orders of Muḥammad, all except for the Virgin and Child, which one report states was preserved until destroyed when the Ka'ba suffered damage by fire during the Second Civil War.³⁰⁹ It has been suggested that this figure may have been a representation of Jesus the Saviour, from the Syriac *pārūqā*,³¹⁰ but this idea rests on many undecidable assumptions. Depictions of Jesus and Mary may well have been the contribution of Christians *de passage*, holding to a Christianity which was largely a cult of Christ and which, as suggested, may have been of syncretistic character and did not exclude other deities.

It has also been suggested that this may well have been the figure of Muḥammad himself,³¹¹ which cannot be entirely excluded and might be connected with Muḥammad's having become *Rabb al-Ka'ba*. Any worries arising from Muslim iconoclasm can be set aside, this being a late Umayyad phenomenon.³¹² But this identification complicates the chronology at least as transmitted in al-Mas'ūdī's report, which places it before the prophet's preaching and ministry began.

Whatever the truth of this matter, the one thing that emerges is that there were representations of ancestors and deities. These would need to be considered along with the other contents of the location, arms and treasures found within, emblematising the political, quasi-royal leadership which Muḥammad was claiming.³¹³ The Abrahamisation of genealogies possessed by these figures, be it contemporary with Muḥammad (as is not improbable albeit needing to be seen as fragmentary and incipient) or a later gloss, is in line with the Biblicism mentioned above, one in which a filiation was construed between the Meccan guardians of the Ka'ba and the figure of Abraham, and which is also likely to have been Medinan, or following the conquest of Mecca. God became the deity not only of Muḥammad or of the Ka'ba, but of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac (Q, 2.133). This may also

³⁰⁸ Bashear, 'Fārūq'. The epithet *al-fārūq* does not occur in Ḥassān b. Thābit's elegiac poem on the death of 'Umar (*Diwān*, cxxxv).

³⁰⁹ Al-Azraqi, *Makka*, 112.

³¹⁰ Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 392, as a corroboration for the author's thesis of Christian presence in Mecca: *ibid.*, 390 ff., 525 f.

³¹¹ Islam Dayeh, personal communication.

³¹² On this theme and its chronology, see Paret, 'Entstehungszeit', and van Reenen, 'Bilderverbot'. For the early Paleo-Muslim period, see Baer, 'Human figure'. For broader, regional historical parameters, Dodd, 'Image', 38 ff. and *passim*.

³¹³ Again, this was first noted by Pococke, *Specimen Historiae*, 96 f.

have been a Biblicisation of a possible pagan, heroic figure of Abraham mentioned earlier, if this could in any way be assuredly assumed to have existed among the Meccans. Old or new, the alleged Abraham – by Muslim consensus represented as the archetypical Muslim – inside the Ka‘ba, or an Abrahamised other, acting as an agent of Hubal, or perhaps originally Hubal is perplexing, and perhaps in its very incongruity bears testimony to the archaic provenance of al-Mas‘ūdī’s report.

Taxonomy of the supernatural

Just as the Meccan cultic cluster, and its ancestral custodians, were incorporated into the unipolar cultic economy of Muḥammad’s God, so also must the angels mentioned in al-Mas‘ūdī’s ekphrasis be regarded. It may very well have been the case that the angels mentioned in this report were pagan deities or other supernatural beings. In fact, the term *mal’ak*, briefly discussed above, was transferred in the Qur’ān from the register of divinity to another, consonant with the transcendent nature of the new exclusive divinity. They were no longer God’s or any god’s cognates, His *andād*, divinity having become indivisible. They were becoming part of a command economy of the divine from which radiated a sublime, majestic energy from the one point and from all points.

Those members of the supernatural world who were not incorporated into the new regime of divinity were obliterated, cultically and conceptually. These *ālīha*, deities, also called *malā’ika*, angels, were, with the growing exclusivity of Muḥammad’s God, briefly and ambivalently angelised, until such time as they were rejected.³¹⁴ Works of prophetic biography and of Muḥammad’s military activities, *Maghāzī*, are replete with accounts of expeditions sent by the Prophet to destroy all possible cultic sites except for that of Mecca. These deities, demonised and indeed satanised in the Qur’ān from the late Meccan period (very insistently in Q, 7.3, 27, 30), also appeared graphically so to early Muslim traditions, very much in line with beliefs in transmogrification: when the betyls of al-‘Uzzā, Manāt and Nā’ila were destroyed, the inhabiting beings appeared in the guise of unkempt, black, naked crones, who were duly smitten,³¹⁵ their jewellery, normally adorning idols, taken away.³¹⁶

The conceptual ground had thus been prepared for the derogation of deities and their categorical reclassification in the course of Muḥammad’s

³¹⁴ Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 230f., 546–7 n. 324.

³¹⁵ *SH*, 3.275 f.; al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 77, 80 f.

³¹⁶ A most interesting discussion of wider associations is given by Montgomery, ‘Empty Ḥijāz’, 90 f. and *passim*.

developing activities. From the ambivalence of the Satanic Verses, and from the middle Meccan period when these *malā'ika* were said to be incapable of interceding with God on the part of their worshippers except by permission from al-Raḥmān, a move was made towards a wholesale rejection of the capacity for intercession (Q, 19.86, 20.108); intercession with deities by other deities on behalf of mortals was not unknown elsewhere.³¹⁷ When pagan deities were not regarded as chimerical, and implicitly taken for existent, they were said ultimately to repudiate the worship directed towards them and to disavow their worshippers (Q, 19.80, 35.14). A poem written on the occasion of the Battle of Ḥunayn (AH 8) declared that the horses of Allāh had vanquished the horses of Allāt;³¹⁸ the latter deity was incapable of helping herself (Q, 21.42), being ineffectual and creaturely, as the Qur'ān states with scathing eloquence (Q, 11.101; 13.16; 16.17, 20, 73, 74; 17.56; 25.3). The triumph of Muḥammad was the triumph of his God. But eliminating the capacity for intercession also eliminated presumptions of parity between Allāh and Allāt.

These ineffectual deities were also shown up in exercises of magical exhibitionism, in probative miracles reminiscent of the legends of Moses and Abraham, of Jacob and Laban, albeit less dramatic.³¹⁹ Finally, they were subject to scabrous sacrilege, not unusual in religious polemics.³²⁰ Allāt was profaned when one of Muḥammad's followers retorted to the insult of the Prophet by a pagan, in the manner of free loquacity common at the time, by inviting the pagan offender to go bite (in another version: suck) his Lady's clitoris.³²¹

As for the *jinn*, they were recast as a category of intermediate supernatural beings subject to Allāh's authority. Some were benign and others

³¹⁷ See also Hoyland, *Arabia*, 140, on intercession with 'Athtar by another deity in south Arabia.

³¹⁸ Krone, *al-Lāṭ*, 182 f. ³¹⁹ *SII*, §§ 237, 254; Genesis 31.46–8, 53–4 and *passim*; 1 Kings 18.18–40.

³²⁰ For instance, the Talmudic stories of Mary: Krauss, *Leben Jesu*, 'Einleitung', *passim*, and Schäfer, *Jesus*, 20 ff.

³²¹ This person is said to have been Abū Bakr or 'Urwa b. Ma'sūd al-Thaqafi: al-Jāhiz, *al-Ḥayawān*, 3.42 and 42 n.; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Iṣāba*, 1.146. Such profanation is attributed to Abū Bakr in two other cases (WAQ, 581, 595). Saying to a man, or of a man, that he was 'a sucker' or 'a biter' of his own mother's clitoris was a grievous but not uncommon insult among the Arabs (Kadar, *Saqifa*, 107 ff.; 'b- z-r', *LA*), and the expression continued in use well into Abbasid times. For the use of obscene imprecations among the Arabs, see 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 4.596–7. Muḥammad himself was the subject of grave insults, and doubtless many of those have been erased from memory. For the grievous epithet *al-abtar* applied to him by his detractors, see Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 239 ff., 555 n. 343. 'Mockery', *EQ*, reviews Qur'ānic material on this matter. The polemics were fierce, conducted on Muḥammad's side by Ḥassan b. Thābit, Ka'b b. Mālik and 'Abd Allāh b. Ruwāḥa (see especially *AGH*, 16.153). See, for instance, Ḥassan b. Thābit's lampoon of Ubayy b. Khalaf al-Jumāḥī, who taunted Muḥammad with an old bone, asking him how it was to be resurrected (*Diwān*, poem 1v), and Bell, *Commentary*, 2.147.

were malign, but both were cast according to a subordinationist idiom and, eventually, Islamised. There is a vast body of reports concerning *jinn* abdicating their traditional flightiness and declaring themselves for Muḥammad, embracing Muḥammad's religion, and enjoining their erstwhile human companions to do likewise.³²² The *kāhina* Sawdā' b. Zuhra, seemingly the most prominent among Quraysh, prompted by a *hātaf*, was reportedly among those who predicted the coming of Muḥammad the *nadhīr*.³²³ And although the vast majority of such reports may be adjudged to be later embellishments and narrative expansions, some reports referring to voices heard from betyls or idols do preserve archaic diction, vocabulary and other linguistic features indicating very early provenance.³²⁴

As for the malign actions of the *jinn*, these were ascribed to the specific category of demons. This is in line with the process of growing categorical systematisation of the supernatural evident in the Qur'ān, with the evil *jinn* disappearing from the Medinan *sūras*, to be replaced by devils, *shayṭān* (sg. *shayṭān*),³²⁵ particularly vexatious and refractory ones being designated by the terms *ʿifrīt* and *mārid*, each occurring once only in the Qur'ān (Q. 27.39, 37.7).³²⁶ These devils do occur in Meccan *sūras*, somewhat less extensively, and often appear as a proper name in the singular.³²⁷ The major such being, Iblīs (Satan), occurs relatively little in the Qur'ān, mentioned but nine times (in contrast to sixty-three occurrences of *Shayṭān*, both as a common noun and as a proper name).³²⁸ He is treated as a major functionary of divine government, sharing with his own kind, as with the *jinn* and, as we shall see, the angels the capacity for materialisation and transmogrification. In all, devils are in their actions construed as the obnoxious equivalents of the angels, yet in terms of the divine economy as expressed in cosmogony they belong to the same class of beings as the *jinn*, being made of fire.³²⁹ In many instances, *shayṭān* became a derived name

³²² For instance: *SH*, 1.291 ff.; al-Damīrī, *al-Ḥayawān*, 1.263 ff.; 'Ajīna, *Asaṭīr*, 2.51 ff. Palestinian Christians of the time held similar views, believing that certain demons believed in the mystery of Christ, in relics, sacred oils, saints, and other elements of Christian cult and belief: Flusin, *Saint Anastase*, 2.405.

³²³ Ibn Sa'īd, *Nashwa*, 1.367. ³²⁴ For instance, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Hawāṭif*, § 96.

³²⁵ Niekrens, *Engel- und Geistesvorstellung*, 87 f.

³²⁶ For etymologies, see Chelhod, *Structures*, 70, and Reynolds, *The Qur'ān*, 75 n. 93. One need not always go far in searching for etymologies in order to prove non-Arabian, usually Ethiopian, provenance of the idea and name. There are at least two instances for the occurrence of *shayṭān* in the Arabic onomasticon (*AGH*, 16.193; Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishtiqāq*, 401). This had been noted by Wellhausen, *Reste*, 200 n. 1.

³²⁷ Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 534 n. 289, 543–4 n. 316.

³²⁸ See Bell, *Commentary*, 2.150 and Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 198 ff.

³²⁹ Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 189 ff., where fire is a substance which the author interprets, not implausibly, in terms of the scorching winds of the desert rather than of some cosmic, archetypal substance.

applied to evil humans, or had already been so, and was indeed applied metaphorically to deities one repudiated after conversion.³³⁰

Muslim demonology was later to flower luxuriantly in a manner that had been characteristic of other monotheisms, after a pattern shared with both Biblical Testaments.³³¹ But a historically disciplined view must be wary of anachronistic retrojection, and rest content with a very fragmentary mythical lore when speaking of the time of Paleo-Islam. That the Qur'ānic and other devils, like the angels, shared certain capacities of God is as undeniable as it seems universal. But they share them by commission from Him, which is a secondary development. The devil causes men to disbelieve, only to repudiate them later (Q, 59.16–17), in the manner of the goddesses mentioned above. Their power over the men they lead astray is acquired by divine commission (Q, 43.3–7).

For the rest, angels are brought into the ambit of the unique divinity, eventually to be Islamised, as were natural forces, now conveying or accompanied by the *rūḥ* (spirit, *pneuma*) radiated and metaphorically exhaled by God. Thunder, after whom *sūra* 13 is named, praises God (Q, 13.13),³³² who commands natural forces. Like demonology, Qur'ānic angelology is uncertain, in all probability reflecting conceptual and mythological indeterminacy.³³³ Angelic beings as they occur are generally diffuse and rarely personalised; Gabriel and Michael occur only in the later Meccan period.³³⁴ But angels do perform specific functions in the service of the Lord, and are mentioned in the context of a rudimentary mythical apparatus. They were created from light, in contrast to the *jinn* and the devils – clearly here a mechanism of elaborating the emergent reclassification of the supernatural – and they minister to God's wishes, on a royalist model of central command.

³³⁰ Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 50 f.

³³¹ On which: Kelly, *Satan*, parts I and II, *passim*; Beltz, *Mythen*, 214.

³³² This matter was the subject of extensive mythological elaboration in which thunder and other natural forces were ascribed to personified angelic agency, early on, existing already in 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr (*US*, no. 84). See, for instance, MbS, 2.370, 3.601 and al-Suyūṭī, *al-Hay'a*, §§ 8.3 ff. There may have been elementary notions of this kind floating around among the ancient Arabs, and we know that deities did have forms of control over the elements, or at least the capacity to deploy the elements when they wished to punish. See *al-Mufaddaliyyāt*, 28.16 (al-Muthaqqib al-'Abdī, d. c. 588) for God controlling mountains, although it may be the case that the word *Allāh* in this verse is a later interpolation. In Job 37:2–3, God thunders and rumbles, and sends his lightning to the corners of the earth; He also appears to Job and elsewhere in a whirlwind (Job 38.1). In all, the connection between deities, spirits and natural forces is ubiquitous (see Colpe, 'Geister', col. 579 f.).

³³³ See the accounts of Eichler, *Dschinn*, chs. 2 and 3, *passim*; Niekrens, *Engel- und Geistesvorstellung*, 5 ff.; Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 541–2 nn. 314–15.

³³⁴ This has long been noted: Bevan, 'Ascension', 52. See in particular Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 220, 547–8 n. 325.

Angels lead away persons when the time of their death arrives (Q, 4.97), clearly by commission of the Lord, and are appointed guardians of the Fire (Q, 74.31), usually understood as hell. Apart from such commissions, these winged creatures (Q, 35.1)³³⁵ minister to Him in two primary capacities, as scribes registering the deeds of men, and as a host in serried ranks surrounding His Throne and guarding the gates of the heavens (Q, 37.1–10, 54.11), in celestial heights called *al-malāʾ al-ʿālā*, the Elevated Council, or to some others, *ʿIlīyyūn*,³³⁶ with their necks turned upwards towards Him, in perpetual gestures and words of praise (*tasbīḥ*)³³⁷ – they are ‘exemplary creatures’.³³⁸ They assist Muḥammad and his companions in battle (Q, 3.123–4, 9.26),³³⁹ in hosts of 300,000 and 500,000 (Q, 3.123–5), sometimes invisible (Q, 9.26), sometimes borne by winds,³⁴⁰ but at other times, as of old: in Qurʾānic passages concerning Lot as well as at the Battle of the Elephant, destroying God’s adversaries with deadly pellets raining down from the sky (Q, 11.82, 15.74, 105.4).³⁴¹ The last form of angelic intervention was ascribed to them as they annihilated the People of Lot, but similarly, to the defeat of the People of the Elephant; the two were, not uncharacteristically for the Qurʾān, assimilated to each other by analogy.³⁴²

That the two supernatural creatures Hārūt and Mārūt, instructors in magic, were called angels (Q, 2.102) rather than demons or *jinn* was most probably done by default of clear categorical boundaries, and may reflect an earlier, looser Arab usage of ‘angel’. There is mention of ‘the two angels’ as witnesses to ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s loan document mentioned

³³⁵ Compare Umayya b. Abī al-Salt, on whose angelology see Seidensticker, ‘Authenticity’, 93.

³³⁶ Bell (*Commentary*, 2.511) considers *ʿElyon* to be an improbable equivalent of *ʿIlīyyūn*, and proposes instead Elysium, ‘for want of a better suggestion’.

³³⁷ Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 96; Niekrens, *Engel- und Geistesvorstellung*, 12 ff., 27 f.; Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 215 f. For angelic necks perpetually turned (*al-malāʾikāt sūrʿan*), Umayya b. Abī al-Salt, *Dīwān*, 31.4. The same author offers a detailed description of God’s court and of celestial topography (*Dīwān*, 3.15, 10.13 ff., 10.25, 31.3–4), descriptions which were to flourish in great detail later: MbS, 4.143 and *passim*; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Hayʾa*, §§ 1 ff. *ʿIlīyyūn* was in exegetical tradition often interpreted, among other things (including location), as a register, often of angelic deeds: al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 4.232. See also al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, at Q, 83.18–19.

³³⁸ Niekrens, *Engel- und Geistesvorstellung*, 15: ‘vorbildliche Geschöpfe’.

³³⁹ They participated at Badr, but not at Uḥūd, though they witnessed other battles: WAQ, 235; *SIH*, 2.200.

³⁴⁰ WAQ, 57.

³⁴¹ Leemhuis (‘Qurʾānic Siggīl’, 125 f.) and de Blois (‘Hijāratun’, 61 f.) offer contradictory but equally far-fetched etymological interpretations. In any case, pellets can rain down as divine vengeance without explicit association with angels (Q, 8.32). *SIH*, 1:47 f., provides a detailed account of the way in which these pellets were carried, by birds, standing for avenging angels.

³⁴² Toelle, *Coran*, 182 ff., discussing the terms used in these Qurʾānic passages and comparing these accounts with not dissimilar Biblical material concerning the people of Lot (sulphur and fire) and the Amorites (a rain of stones: Joshua 10.11).

above,³⁴³ whether this may or may not have designated specific beings is impossible to determine. Moreover, that Muḥammad, when reportedly hearing of the poetical ekphrasis of the image of a man, an ox, an eagle and a lion,³⁴⁴ is said to have designated these as a representation of angels bearing God's Throne,³⁴⁵ conveys the same sense of categorical fluidity, and an early tendency towards mythification by absorbing and combining local and distant material.

Be that as it may, it is necessary to note at this stage the frequent conjunction of angels with the Spirit. There is no suggestion anywhere in the Qur'ān that they were not distinct, or that the Spirit denoted Gabriel.³⁴⁶ What we have is a situation in which it is often difficult to disengage God from His Messenger categorically, in a manner reminiscent of, but not necessarily directly inspired by, the biblical *mal'ak Yahweh* which is at times indistinguishable from Yahweh Himself,³⁴⁷ and also of the switch between God and His messenger with reference to the Metatron, 'the lesser Yahweh'.³⁴⁸ Musaylima and al-Raḥmān are of a type with this conception. All are active in situations in which God displays an epiphanic predilection which, theological elaborations apart, belongs to a world in which categories of the natural and supernatural are not distinct ontologically. It is not insignificant that *mal'ak Yahweh* existed only for the duration of his commission.³⁴⁹

The Qur'ān, intriguingly, sometimes associates, and perhaps conflates sympathetically and by synecdoche, the Lord, Rabb, and the angels almost

³⁴³ Al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 8; Ibn Qutayba, *Faḍl*, 89.

³⁴⁴ Umayya b. Abī al-Salt, *Dīwān*, 10.47. It may usefully be recalled, for comparative purposes, that the Biblical cherubim (like those whose images were allegedly carved around the walls of Solomon's temple) were sphinxes that acted as guardians of the sacred tree or as carriers of the divine throne: 'Cherubim', *DDD*.

³⁴⁵ Al-Jāhīz, *al-Ḥayawān*, 6.222 and 365–6 n. 4. This image, inspired by Ezekiel 1:10, is likely to have been a later tradition.

³⁴⁶ Ḥassān b. Thābit (*Dīwān*, 1.19, 21) speaks of God sending forth a slave of His (Muḥammad), the Trusty Gabriel and the Spirit of Holiness, the three clearly distinct beings.

³⁴⁷ 'Angel of Yahweh', *DDD*.

³⁴⁸ 3 Enoch 12.5, 48C.7, 48D.1. That a borrowing is unlikely to have been involved here might be reconfirmed by the fact that the Talmud was reluctant to regard Enoch favourably: 'Metatron' *Encyclopedia Judaica*. It should be noted that this metatronic conception had some purchase in exegetical literature, attributed to the Spirit: see, for instance, Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, 2.547; Wasserstrom (*Between Muslim and Jew*, 182, 190 ff.) suggests, improbably, that the concept was known in Muḥammad's Arabia through Merkava texts. The uncertain identity of the Metatron, like that of the Qur'ānic Spirit, seems inspired by a similar indeterminacy: he is Enoch, has archangelic properties, is 'the lesser Yahweh' and is polyonymous, having seventy names (3 Enoch 4.1 ff., 45, 48.10). The Metatron is also one whose name is sometimes said to be identical with that of his Lord, and his appearance is infused, like that of the Lord, with 'Jewish macrocosmic anthropomorphism': Stroumsa, 'Forms(s) of god', 271 ff. Cf. Beltz, *Mythen*, 210 f., and Newby, *History*, 59 ff.

³⁴⁹ Westermann, *Basic Forms*, 100.

indifferently during the Meccan period, speaking of God and the angel (in the singular) coming forth in formation (Q, 89.22) – implying multiplicity in a manner that Arabic grammar would recognise as *mufrad bi-ṣiḡhat al-jam'*, a singular in plural form. It speaks equally of the arrival of 'the angels . . . or your Lord, or Signs from your Lord' (Q, 6.158). It also speaks of a visitation during sleep (*tāyif*, *tā'if*) from or of (*min*) the Lord (Q, 68.19), in what form is unclear. Muslim traditions were at pains to explain away this categorical imbrication.

A poem, in all likelihood contemporary with Muḥammad, speaks of the sky obeying its Trusty One (*ṣaydaq*, *amīn*, *arshad*),³⁵⁰ a term which need not be interpreted as an angel, but may well refer to Muḥammad implicitly, or possibly to someone else (Umayya b. Abī al-Salṭ himself, perhaps) in a juxtaposition not dissimilar to that of Musaylima and al-Raḥmān. Finally, it might be noted with regard to this imbrication that the question is still open as to why the Qur'ān does not ascribe humanity to Jesus explicitly, as it does to Muḥammad: what might be the significance of the continuous conjunction of Jesus, the Spirit and God? What categorical and classificatory implications might be drawn from Jesus' capacity to breathe life into clay?

The Spirit, *rūḥ*, a term whose connotations evolved with the history of the Qur'ān,³⁵¹ may also be regarded from this perspective of categorical uncertainty – Muslim traditions, and modern scholarship generally following it, had usually identified this term with the revelation, or with Gabriel, without textual, historical, contextual or documentary Qur'ānic sanction. Gabriel was to be only a late Qur'ānic personification of divine agency,³⁵² simplifying categorisation and clearing out indeterminacy. There are many passages from various periods that mention angels and the Spirit together (Q, 70.4, 78.38, 97.4). The angels 'bring down' the Spirit (Q, 16.1). Both might, like *mal'ak Yahweh*, be transient manifestations of God's energy, with a functional character that is fundamentally jinnic. The spirit may indeed become an angel, as with the spirit sent to Mary, appearing to her in human form (Q, 19.7). The Holy Spirit brings forth Signs (Q, 16.102), and helps Jesus (Q, 2.87, 253; 5.110), and God sends forth a Spirit from His Command (Q, 16.2).³⁵³ The differentiation between Spirit and Command is not always distinct, their categorical separation being introduced

³⁵⁰ Umayya b. Abī al-Salṭ, *Dīwān*, 10.21.

³⁵¹ This had already been noted by Grimme, *Muhammad*, 2.51 f. See Chabbi, *Coran*, 99 ff., and 'Nafs', *EI*, §§ I.[A], I.B, IV.

³⁵² Cf. Bell, *Commentary*, 2.563.

³⁵³ See the overview of Spirit and of its possible Biblical intertextual references in 'Holy spirit', *EQ*.

furtively, as the latter acquired the sense of a more literal, direct command in later parts of the Qur'ān.³⁵⁴

Quite obviously, distinctions in later passages are clearer; when the angels and the Spirit are serried, they speak only with the permission of al-Raḥmān (Q, 78.38). But the two beings are distinct. The Spirit is clearly *of* God, sometimes figured angelically, and often His metonymical personification. The relationship is not necessarily one of hypostasis.³⁵⁵ It could rather be interpreted in terms of a magical conceptual infrastructure upon which the philosophical notion of hypostasis was based, one that might underlie it mytho-poetically, and that might be philosophically sublimated as hypostasis if conceived as a functional differentiation within divine activity.³⁵⁶ But the relationship is epiphanic. The Spirit is often a substantive projection of God, a nouminous energy, and, as often in epiphany, is subtended by a notion of indeterminate consistency of substance allowing thoughts of transmogrification and transfiguration. Like the Word in John 1.1, for instance, the Word which 'was with God' and 'was God', the prepositions relating God and Spirit in the Qur'ān betoken a metonymical and allegorical slippage of the referent in a play of identity and separation, in all cases indicating unity and continuity of action.

The continuity between God and the Spirit of Him, God and His Word, is conceived almost materially, just as transmogrification is understood materially, in terms of a plasticity, as a change of form and a diminution of plenitude, in the context of a categorical ambiguity. *Al-Rūḥ al-amīn* (the Trusty Spirit) and *al-rasūl al-amīn* (the Trusty Messenger), the latter applying equally to God's angel and to Muḥammad as well, in an agreement of attributes,³⁵⁷ are in many implicit ways continuous. Without implying that there may have been an identification between Muḥammad and Gabriel, it might be noted, again, that we are dealing with an *imaginaire* in which boundaries between nature and the supernatural were not firm, and where transmogrification was clearly perceived by audiences.

Like the spirit exhaled into the clay out of which Adam was fashioned, and into Mary's body whence Jesus came, the Spirit – and by displacement angels and other transfigurations of the divine as well – represents a translocation of divine presence, a dramatisation of sympathetic magic acting by contiguity. In a categorically confused manner that conflates God's

³⁵⁴ Hirschfeld, *Researches*, 15 f., where it is also argued that, in Qur'ānic stories of Jesus, Command and Word are identified, on which theme see also 'Jesus', *EQ*, 3.15. The author's continuous recourse to Judaising interpretations seems often to be unnecessary.

³⁵⁵ As with Horovitz, 'Himmelfahrt', 178.

³⁵⁶ Ju'ayt, *al-Sīra*, 1.56, 63 f.

³⁵⁷ As noted by Widengren, *Muḥammad*, 9. See also Horovitz, *Untersuchungen*, 46, on *rasūl karīm*.

substantive energy with the angels, the Spirit appears to Mary in human form during the Annunciation, and declares itself to be a messenger of the Lord (Q, 19.17, 19). Similarly, the related Qur'ānic term *sakīna*, occurring in Meccan *sūras*, also conveys the sense of a subliminal but nevertheless real presence of God's protective energy,³⁵⁸ later duly mythified as an incarnate wind.³⁵⁹ Epiphany is often confusing: God and God's manifestation are on some counts one, but on other, generally dogmatically grounded counts, distinct.³⁶⁰ But clearly, angels and the Spirit are two different categories of being: the former are beings normally distinct from God, while the latter is continuous with Him.

A systematic tally of the notion of Spirit in the Qur'ān reveals a variety of senses, associated with different stages of Muḥammad's ministry.³⁶¹ God breathes of his spirit into the clay out of which Adam was created. He breathes into Mary's intact body. The Spirit is a mysterious matter of (*min amr*) God (Q, 16.2, 17.87, 40.15); it is 'of Him (Q, 58.22). It creates by animation and contiguous magical insemination, gives succour to His worshippers, and brings forth inspiration and revelation. Other senses of the Spirit in the Qur'ān notwithstanding, we clearly have here a concept which conveys the transmission of sublime energy, a spirit materially conceived, which incorporates the clearly much lesser and less ample preternatural animating energies of the *jinn* and of the betylic Lords. The Lord of the Meccan House, al-Raḥmān/Allāh, transposes and thereby transfigures local preternatural energies into cosmocratic and pantocratic registers. With the connotative expansion of the Paleo-Muslim divinity, with His subordinationist economy of the divine, the pantheon becomes, once again, a pantheos.

God manifest

The categorical uncertainties concerning the taxonomy of the divine have a very close connection with the manner in which Muḥammad

³⁵⁸ See the analysis of this term and its connotations by Goldziher, *Abhandlungen*, 177 ff., 190 f., 196 n. 1. Busse ('Herrschartypen', 72 n. 20) speaks of the role of this power in the struggle against Meccans.

³⁵⁹ 'Shekinah', *EQ*, 4.590 f., based in part on al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 28, on which see also Mujāhid, *Tafsīr*, § 1585, where the *Sakīna* is described as an entity of God (*min Allāh*), with a feline head, and two wings. This *EQ* article is weakened by its unnecessarily Hebraising interpretations, announced by its title.

³⁶⁰ Thus in the Old Testament the Spirit of God is sent to various prophets (Numbers 11.17–29; 1 Samuel 10.10); when rendered as the active subject, it represents God Himself, as in 1 Samuel 16.13–23 (see Colpe, 'Geister', 580).

³⁶¹ O'Shaughnessy, *Development*, 13 ff.

received inspiration from his Lord.³⁶² We saw in the previous chapter that Muḥammad needed to respond to accusations that he was just another seer or *kāhin*, and also needed to distance his enunciations on behalf of his Lord from poetry, not least from rhymed prose, *sajʿ*, he being reported plausibly to have told his followers to avoid *sajʿ* when supplicating the Lord.³⁶³ We also saw that he had a familiar *jinni* or *shayṭān* called al-Abyaḍ, a matter that, curiously, was engaged neither defensively nor apologetically by him or by his followers, or by Muslim traditions thereafter.³⁶⁴ Finally, we saw that Muḥammad described divine inspiration in somatic and physical terms not unlike those of the *kuhhān*; a very early *sūra* (Q, 74.1) calls Muḥammad himself *al-muddaththir* (and the *sūra* itself is so entitled), with reference to a cloak protecting the prophet, like the *kuhhān*, from the cold shivers associated with the rigours of inspiration.³⁶⁵

What is clear from this picture is that Muḥammad's prophecy inhabited two worlds, that of his contemporary pagan Arabs, and that which might for the sake of analogy be described as a Biblical world, still in the making. These were two worlds that formed a continuum between two boundary conditions for the conception of divinity, the one arguably initial and cultic in the elementary sense, and the other sublimated and elaborated into durable form.³⁶⁶

The Qurʾān bears testimony to this transition, with all its ambivalences, incoherences and uncertainties. Its poetics as reflected in oath elements used older forms of ecstatic diction often as a challenge, with a paraneitic attenuation that made possible perspectives of newer enunciative forms more appropriate to a deity ultimately to be freed of the pagan boundaries of locality and of the simple exchange relation between worshipper and his divinity.³⁶⁷ A putative differentiation was made between pagan inspiration and divine revelation (*wahy*, *tanzīl*) as the direct speech of the divinity transmitted by Muḥammad, in the chronological course of the Qurʾān: starting with the late Meccan period and its break with the pagan goddesses,

³⁶² A most useful synoptic account is found in 'Prophets and prophethood', *EQ*, esp. 4.293 f.

³⁶³ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 8.92.

³⁶⁴ Some later traditions, controverted as many were, have it that Muḥammad had the archangel Isrāfīl as a *qarīn* in his earliest years, followed by Gabriel: TAB, 354.

³⁶⁵ Very many reports relate Muhammad's shivers and his request to his wife Khadija that he be covered ('*zammilūnī*', '*daththirūnī*') – a Qurʾānic *sūra* is entitled al-Muzzammil, where Muhammad is addressed as *yā ayyuhā'l-muzzammil* (Q, 73.1). See Bilhāj Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAyib, *Daththirīnī*, 74 ff.

³⁶⁶ Thus, more elaborately developed systems such as Chaldaean theurgy were premised on the elementary pragmatic equivalence of theurgy and philosophy, of the vatic and the conceptual: Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles*, 462 ff. This system did not escape the attention of Muslim exegesis: al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, at Q, 72.1.

³⁶⁷ Neuwirth, 'Historische Muhammad', 100.

progressively more firmly allied to Biblicising templates, and progressively recasting Muḥammad as a universal prophet rather than as simply a Warner, *nadhīr*, to his own people.³⁶⁸

It is not surprising, then, that Muḥammad distanced his inspiration from the insinuations by the *jinn*, as some of these were demonised progressively. An early report has him fearing that he might be a *kāhin*, given that he heard voices and perceived lights he could not properly understand.³⁶⁹ The integrity of Muḥammad's inspiration was complemented by the termination of the activities of the *kubhān* and the activity of *kahāna*, as the heavens were henceforth barred to the *jinn*, now reclassified as devils, *shayāṭīn*, they being bombarded with flaming darts or shooting stars that protected the higher realms from their unsolicited curiosity (Q, 15.16–18 and cf. Q, 72.1–3).³⁷⁰ Nevertheless, it must be appreciated that there is no indication that this implied the lack of access by the devils to foreknowledge of matters other than those relating to Muḥammad's commission.³⁷¹ This distancing is correlative with distanciation from poetry, poets being described in the Qur'ān as a train of the perverse and the aberrant (*al-ghāwūn*), 'astray in every valley', inspired by devils (Q, 26. 221–5).³⁷² And of course, this notion of listening in to the deliberations of God and his court would only have been introduced once it was thought that He was also transcendent, and once a rudimentary angelology in these terms was being introduced.

Muslim traditions are replete with narratives whose historicity is difficult to assess, but which nevertheless carry suggestive echoes of conditions pertaining to the receipt of inspiration during Muḥammad's time. These tell of a number of individuals such as one Abū Fukayha, demonised in various measures, who had been confused with Muḥammad on account of his physical appearance. Others were claimed by Muḥammad's adversaries to have inspired the Apostle by insinuation, sometimes, like Ibn Dihya al-Kalbī, by the ruse of transmogrification.³⁷³ Yet others, like the Jew Ibn Ṣayyād, later associated with the Antichrist (*al-Dajjal*), who does not appear in the Qur'ān, claimed equally to be an apostle of God, and that Muḥammad was

³⁶⁸ Cf. Jeffery, *Qur'an as Scripture*, 57 f. ³⁶⁹ *US*, no. 32; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1/1.130.

³⁷⁰ Meteoroids seen during Muḥammad's activity were thus interpreted later: *SIH*, 1.191. Hawting (*Idolatry*, 35 f.), his almost irrepressible partiality to Talmudic parallels notwithstanding, does consider this theme in terms of Arab soothsaying.

³⁷¹ See *SH*, 1.298 ff. and Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 101. Cf. Genesis 6.1–4, on which Kelly, *Satan*, 13. See Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 1.160.

³⁷² Zwettler, 'Mantic Manifesto', 81 ff.

³⁷³ On Abū Fukayha, *MbS*, 3.279 f., 4.483 and Gilliot, 'Informateurs', 108 f. On Ibn Dihya, *SIH*, §§ 465 f. In this regard, there would seem to be little reason to dismiss the belief of 'Ā'isha that Gabriel once appeared to Muḥammad after her own image (*TAB*, 358), or the belief that Satan appeared at Badr in the form of Surāqa b. Ja'tham al-Madlījī (*TAB*, 367).

just another sent to the *ummīyyūn*, gentiles, people without a scripture.³⁷⁴ Yet others, including Umayya b. Abī al-Salt, made pronouncements not dissimilar to Muḥammad's.³⁷⁵ Arabian prophets active during the lifetime of Muḥammad and shortly before have already been discussed above.

Interestingly and tellingly, the prophecy of neither Ibn Ṣayyād nor Khālīd b. Sinān was explicitly denied, by Muḥammad or by later Muslim traditions, and no signs of charges of imposture appear in later elaborations. Of the former as of some of the others, the tell-tale signs of *kuhbān* and of some biblical prophets and contemporary holy men, shivering and wrapped in cloaks, making unintelligible noises and hearing voices, are mentioned. The material is extremely confused and hard to assess, but what is clear is that the increasing use of biblicisms in Muḥammad's pronouncements was twofold: distancing from the normal run of Arab ecstatic prophecy, and correlatively an insertion within a register of late antique scripturalism which was to flower among later generations of Paleo-Muslims and Muslims. What need not be inferred from this is the common assumption that Arabia was awash with monotheistic texts, which came together through the agency of Muḥammad who emblematised them.

What distinguished Muḥammad was that he made a transition from the receipt of inspiration to the receipt of revelation,³⁷⁶ and that he was God's Apostle (*rasūl*),³⁷⁷ a position he had assumed with increasing emphasis as his role in the middle Meccan period expanded beyond that of a Warner to his people,³⁷⁸ having, in the Medinan period,³⁷⁹ the added function of being a Prophet, *nabī*, with clear resonances in Medina with its large population of Jews.³⁸⁰ Apostles were ranked higher than prophets, as in the New Testament, and the combination of Muḥammad's prophetic and apostolic functions was shared with Moses and Ishmael.³⁸¹ *Rasūl*, messenger, is used early at Q, 81.19 with reference to some intangible mighty being,

³⁷⁴ Halperin, 'Ibn Ṣayyād'; Newby, *History of the Jews*, 63.

³⁷⁵ MbS, 3.282. Frank-Kamenetzky, *Untersuchungen, passim*, and Izutsu, *God and Man*, 120 ff. One report has it that Muḥammad had heard a large number of verses by Umayya delivered in his presence ('Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.492).

³⁷⁶ On this theme, Jeffery, *Qur'ān as Scripture*, 55 ff.

³⁷⁷ On which term see Bell, *Commentary*, 2.501 f.

³⁷⁸ Marshall (*God*, 69 ff.) correlated this with the intensification of polemical passages in the Qur'ān.

³⁷⁹ Bell (*Commentary*, 2.128) uses the occurrence of *nabī* as one criterion for the relative chronology of Qur'ānic passages. *Rasūl* occurs 236 times in the Qur'ān, *nabī* 75 times.

³⁸⁰ This is reflected in the preference for it in Medinan poetry contemporary with Muḥammad, while *rasūl* was preferred outside, although it must be noted that preference for the one over the other is sometimes dictated by metrical imperatives: Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 35 ff.

³⁸¹ 'Prophets and Prophethood', *EQ*, 4.289 f.

Muḥammad being referred to in the same period as *ṣāhibukum*,³⁸² and it would not have been unnatural for Muḥammad's followers to have grafted at least a shade of angelic charisma upon him, one perhaps bearing comparison to that of Raḥmān al-Yamāma, and of Raḥmān al-Yaman, as al-Aswad al-'Ansī seems to have been called.³⁸³ Chapter 7 below will discuss the pronominal shifts in the Qur'ān,³⁸⁴ where it is often unclear if the speaker be God, Muḥammad, or an angel or some other supernatural instance, a lack of clarity comparable to the difficulty of distinguishing between prophetic and divine speech in Old Testament prophecies.³⁸⁵

The transition from inspiration to revelation was a qualitative shift from an earlier, initial period, said by Muslim traditions to have lasted some seven years,³⁸⁶ characterised by dream or waking visions (sometimes of a man, later of a prodigious creature) and sounds (the tolling of bells, the humming of bees).³⁸⁷ Inspiration, *wahy*, might be characterised as some 'flashing suggestion or prompting',³⁸⁸ and is a very general term not confined to religious uses. In the Qur'ān, bees are said to have been inspired to regulate their life, a form of communication impenetrable to others than the recipient.³⁸⁹ Muḥammad's initially intransmissible inspiration was followed by auditory inspiration, not bereft of visions, which was the one that evolved into the technical sense of the term *wahy*,³⁹⁰ conveyed by a supernatural agency.³⁹¹ Whether uncanny sounds heard before had verbal components, or how they came to be transposed into such, is entirely obscure. This was emblematised in the Qur'ān and by later Muslim traditions by command of a supernatural being to Muḥammad to read: *iqra'*! (Q, 96.1, 3).³⁹² The idea of vocal inspiration was to grow in strength in tandem with the concept of Muḥammad as the recipient of a readable and verbally transmissible Scripture,³⁹³ gradually modelled upon a long-standing model of the Apostolate,³⁹⁴ adding that the coming of Muḥammad himself had been foretold in the Bible.

However, such Qur'ānic Biblicism did not amount to a Biblisation of the Qur'ān, but rather involved the Qur'ānisation of biblical figures,

³⁸² Literally, 'your friend', conveying the sense of 'this man'. See the comments of Bell, *Commentary*, 2.315 and Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 199.

³⁸³ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, § 1522. ³⁸⁴ See especially Déroche, *Coran*, 41 f. and Dundes, *Fables*, 45 f.

³⁸⁵ Westermann, *Basic Forms*, 94 f. ³⁸⁶ Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1.191.

³⁸⁷ *US*, nos. 34a, 34 b, 35a, 37; *TAB*, 325 f.; *SH*, 1.367 f. For the fully fledged mythification of this, see *SH*, 1.341 f., 369. A very good account in 'Revelation', *EQ*, 4.441.

³⁸⁸ Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 21. ³⁸⁹ Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 20; 'Revelation', *EQ*, 4.439, 441.

³⁹⁰ Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1.192; 'Revelation', *EQ*, 4.440, 443. ³⁹¹ Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 23.

³⁹² On these traditions, and the probability of their essential veracity, Schoeler, *Charakter*, 114 f. and 60 ff.

³⁹³ *TG*, 4.612, 613 ff., and cf. Westermann, *Basic Forms*, 100.

³⁹⁴ Widengren, *Ascension*, 22 ff., 84.

fragments and templates, used to narrate the specifically Arab analogous prophets Hūd and Šālīḥ, both equally figures of Muḥammad as Moses and Abraham were at different times in Qur'ānic chronology.³⁹⁵ That fragments from the Old and New Testaments appeared in the Medinan period, following anecdotal prophetic material used in the earlier period, is not a matter that bears hasty, default over-interpretation, as is not uncommonly the case.³⁹⁶ Biblical narratives in the Qur'ān have little formal self-sufficiency, deploying motifs rather than themes, used as secondary narrative mythopoeia, in narratives continually intruded upon by a stylistically disruptive rhetoric subordinating Biblical themes to Qur'ānic motifs.³⁹⁷ The prophecy of Muḥammad was indeed recast after Biblical patterns, including patterns of unrequited prophecy. But for all this Biblicism and other material, therefore, historical scholarship needs to avert anachronism and over-interpretation, and to regard the works of the Paleo-Muslim deity as He functioned during Muḥammad's ministry. The function of angels as messengers of God, and particularly as messengers of His revelation, is a capital point in case.

Muslim traditions and modern scholarship alike have almost universally associated Gabriel with the inspiration of Muḥammad, and generally taken the Spirit to be a reference to this Archangel. This association is peculiar to Islam, as has long been recognised, although there are suggestions of such an association in the Book of Daniel, the Gospel of Luke and some Rabbinic literature.³⁹⁸ Muslim traditions were aware, albeit inconsequentially, that the name of Gabriel was unknown in Mecca at the time of Muḥammad,³⁹⁹ at least in the earlier periods of his life. And it has long been noted that the name of Gabriel does not occur in conjunction with the Spirit as the carrier of inspiration to Muḥammad.⁴⁰⁰ Gabriel's name occurs only three times in the Qur'ān, towards the end of the Medinan period (Q, 2.97–98, 60.4).

There is therefore clearly an enormous hiatus between these historical facts and the archangelic Gabriel of Muslim traditions. In the Meccan period, he was entirely absent. The medium of inspiration, even in the most central passages of the Qur'ān, is designated as the Spirit, and the text

³⁹⁵ Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 580 n. 426; Stetkevych, *Golden Bough*, 15, 33.

³⁹⁶ Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 540–1 n. 310; *Coran*, 397 f.

³⁹⁷ Stetkevych, *Golden Bough*, 11 f.; Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 214, 225; *Coran*, 83. The only relative exception is the story of Joseph, which nevertheless does not lie entirely beyond the bounds of the kind of analysis proposed here.

³⁹⁸ Jeffery, *Qur'an as Scripture*, 60 f.; 'Djibrā'il', *EI*. This was not unknown to Muslim traditions: see *SH*, 1.349. Cf. Niekrens, *Engel- und Geistesvorstellung*, 41 f.

³⁹⁹ *SH*, 1.343. ⁴⁰⁰ Niekrens, *Engel- und Geistesvorstellung*, 39.

explicitly speaks against the identification of the Spirit, this being a matter for God alone (Q, 17.85). The Qur'ānic Gabriel is confined to carrying out missions against Muḥammad's enemies and to dealing with his recalcitrant wives.⁴⁰¹ For identifying the medium of inspiration and revelation, we shall need to turn elsewhere, and look into the manner of inspiration more closely.

It would appear that God's inspiration, rendered as revelation, was unmediated.⁴⁰² The veterotestamental deity communicated with Israelite prophets and kings variously but incessantly, directly as we have seen, and indirectly through prophetic media and seers, with whom communication was in any case often direct, especially in the earlier period.⁴⁰³ In a fragment of a verse that does not appear in the canonical redactions of the Qur'ān (Q, 21.52), attributed to Ibn 'Abbās' transmission, God told Muḥammad that He had not previously sent down a directly addressed prophet or messenger.⁴⁰⁴ Were God to send down an angel in human form who would vouch for Muḥammad's truthfulness to the satisfaction of his detractors, these detractors would not be the wiser (Q, 6.8–9). The prodigy of the Qur'ān seems to have required the prodigy of its medium of transmission. Clearly, many alternative media were comprehensible and familiar to Muḥammad's audience, including direct inspiration and communication by *jinn* and named deities alike. The late Meccan Qur'ān was uncomfortable with direct communication between Muḥammad and his God,

⁴⁰¹ Chabbi, *Coran*, 67 ff., 101 ff. Ḥassān b. Thābit (*Dīwān*, XI.11) mentions the presence of Gabriel at the Battle of Uhūd, which Muhammad lost, but the chronology of this poem in Ḥassān's output is uncertain.

⁴⁰² Thus one cannot understand the seemingly a priori need for assuming that inspiration necessarily, apart from what is imparted during personal interviews with the deity (as in the Old Testament and in Muḥammad's Nocturnal Journey), required messengers and agents, as in Jeffery, *Qur'ān as Scripture*, 61 f., in line with Muslim scholarship and much of modern scholarship as well. One would rather look for ubiquitous analogies, such as the declaration by the author of Hesiod's *Theogony* (33 ff.), that Zeus 'breathed a sacred voice in my mouth/with which to celebrate things to come/and things which were before'.

⁴⁰³ For instance: Genesis 12.7, 25.23, 26.23; 1. Samuel 24.10–14, 28.6–8. In 2 Chronicles 36.12, Jeremiah spoke 'from the mouth of the LORD'. Yahweh appeared to Ezekiel in a variety of forms, anthropomorphic, as a throne, in a vision, as a voice (Ezekiel 1.26–7, 2.1, 8.2, 10.1, 43.6–7). He also touched Jeremiah's mouth (Jeremiah 1.9) – see Westermann, *Basic Forms*, 99 and *passim*. Yahweh often appeared as a cloud, or in a cloud: Exodus 13.21–2, 14.19, 24; Numbers 11.25–6 (with a distinct Qur'ānic echo: Q, 2.210). He spoke to Moses face to face (Exodus 33.11, Deuteronomy 4.4–5) but not uncharacteristically (and perhaps, as Alter, *Five Books*, suggests ad Exodus 3.2, as a result of scribal piety) told him that His face would remain unseen (Exodus 33.20: Deuteronomy 4.11–13), and that he heard a sound but saw no image, as in Q, 7.143. God's Throne possesses some form of locomotion (Ezra 1.16–21, 10.2–19; Daniel 7.9), and it is perhaps not unsurprising that He may have been depicted on a coin from Gaza, in the fourth century BC, on a chariot: Mattfeld y de la Torre, 'Yahweh's image'.

⁴⁰⁴ Al-Sijistānī, *Maṣāḥif*, 75: *wa mā arsalnā min qablik^a min rasūlⁱⁿ wa la nabīyⁱⁿ muḥaddathⁱⁿ*.

claimed in the early Meccan period.⁴⁰⁵ It reinterpreted itself and denied human communication with the divine except through a messenger, from behind a Veil, in a gesture to the emergent transcendentalism of Allāh:⁴⁰⁶ the language of inspiration was never rejected, for all its ambiguity, and quite possibly because of this (Q, 42.51).⁴⁰⁷

The medium of Muḥammad's reception of communication from the supernatural was to become, as suggested above, largely auditory. His was anyway a world full of voices emanating from the sky or from rocks, wastes and idols. Later traditions retained this memory, and ascribed to Abū Bakr, for instance, hearing Gabriel's communication with Muḥammad without actually seeing the angel, and the same was said of Muḥammad's wife 'Ā'isha.⁴⁰⁸ But the Qur'ān does contain an account of two brief and enigmatic Muḥammadan visions (Q, 81.15–24, 53.4–18),⁴⁰⁹ and one allusive vision (Q, 17.1), all of which have in common the fact that they make reference neither to Gabriel nor to the Spirit.⁴¹⁰ All three belong to Meccan periods.⁴¹¹

In the first of these visions, Muḥammad beheld an honourable and trusty messenger, esteemed by 'He of the Throne', at the clear horizon (Q, 81.15–24). In the second, he encountered an awesome Being, first at the mysteriously labelled Utmost Horizon (*al-ufuq al-a'lā*). This Being approached, then descended (*tadallā*)⁴¹² to within the distance of two bows 'or closer',⁴¹³ at which point revelation was delivered: an inspiring *ra'iy*, now distant, even transfigured into an altogether different key, rather than familiar; of majestic aspect and awesome proportion. This Being was again seen as he descended for another encounter at the lote-tree (*sidra*) of al-Muntahā, by the Garden of Abode, a location that has been identified as

⁴⁰⁵ Bell, *Commentary*, 2.234.

⁴⁰⁶ Bell, *Commentary*, 2.2:234. Early Muslim traditions interjected exegetically the figure of Gabriel in those Qur'ānic texts that suggested direct communication with God. See Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 34, but see also Mujāhid, *Tafsīr*, §§ 1671, 1674 ff., 1681, 1935.

⁴⁰⁷ On visual imagery of God in the Qur'ān, 'God and his attributes', *EQ*, 2.322 ff.

⁴⁰⁸ Al-Sijistānī, *Maṣāḥif*, 6; *SII*, § 159.

⁴⁰⁹ On these visions, Bell, *Commentary*, 2.315 f. Bell suggested (Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 19) that Q, 81.15–24 was a reinterpretation of Q, 53.4–18, such that the direct vision of God was made into the vision of an angel. See also Bell, *Qur'ān Translated*, 539, and *Commentary*, 2.502.

⁴¹⁰ See the careful analysis of Chabbi, *Coran*, 71 ff.

⁴¹¹ See Bell, 'Muḥammad's visions', 149 f., 151 ff.

⁴¹² This word is used in a poem with reference to the messenger who approached Mary during the Annunciation: Umayya b. Abī al-Salt, *Dīwān*, 79.6. God descended from His heights to meet with his Prophet: thus according to a unique but not improbable tradition: Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 3.2–3, MbS, 4.423, and van Ess, 'Mi'rāğ', 32 ff., 45 ff.

⁴¹³ What needs to be investigated here is the precise senses of the term used, as the distance as stated above may require an interpretation involving cosmic dimensions rather than 'the distance of two bows or closer': 'qāb', in Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v.

earthly and Meccan, but may well be an index of God's own transcendent abode,⁴⁴⁴ with Muḥammad's gaze unflinching from the sight of Signs of his Lord (Q, 53.4–18). What is clear is that an unspecified messenger may be indicated in the first vision, but not in the two following.

One might wisely resist drawing the conclusion that the first of these visions referred to Gabriel, though such an interpretation of the messenger as an angel has been made customarily. But this interpretation would certainly be complicated by the two later visions, although it is of course the case that one need not necessarily expect consistency in an evolving situation. These latter visions, it has long been suspected,⁴⁴⁵ refer to an encounter between Muḥammad and God Himself. This would induce one to regard the first vision as one in which angels and their Lord were conflated in the manner indicated above, consistent with the categorical uncertainty concerning supernatural beings discussed, or to infer otherwise that there were pragmatically two possible separate registers of what the Qur'ān connoted. In either case, the anthropomorphic form is vouched for by God's statement that whoever delivered inspiration would be sent in human form (Q, 6.9).⁴⁴⁶ After all, the two latter visions are posterior to the former chronologically, unless later research were to disprove this compellingly. If one were to adopt the unnecessary perspective of consistently and irrevocably cumulative transcendence for God in the Qur'ān, this would lead to interpretative discordance and incoherence.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. Bell, 'Muḥammad's visions', 149, arguing from the geographical obscurity of Sidrat al-Muntahā. The lote-tree, *sidra* (Rhamnaceae, of the genus *Ziziphus*) was a fruit-bearing tree of considerable importance in Arabia, providing shade and landscape-marking: 'Sidra', *EL*.

⁴⁴⁵ Schrieke, 'Himmelreise', 20, and Bell, 'Muḥammad's visions', 148 f. This view was doubted by Horowitz, 'Himmelfahrt', 159 ff. Chabbi (*Seigneur*, 218) identified the being seen in Q, 53, with a somewhat strained argument, as an inexplicably reconfigured *jinni*, for which argument she appealed to the first verse of this *sūra* which mentions a falling star. However, the same author (*Coran*, 83 ff.) asserts this being to have been God, and suspects a Biblical interference in the *sūra* inspired by the vision of Moses. For an exemplarily thorough investigation of the relevant Qur'ānic texts concerning Muḥammad's visions of God and their later elaborations, see van Ess, 'Mi'rāğ', and 'Vision'.

⁴⁴⁶ *Law ja' alnāḥ^u malak^u la-ja' alnāḥ^u rajul^u*. In addition, there is plentiful evidence in relevant ancient traditions, including Christian and Jewish and their offshoots, the Qur'ān, and Arabic poetry, for a very concrete physical interpretation of the means of access to inspiration, given a non-Ptolemaic cosmology which conceived the heavens as a canopy access to which is to be had by *asbāb*, cords. Van Bladel ('Heavenly cords', 182, 182 n. 25) considers convincingly the Qur'ānic term *sabab* in a manner that yields the meaning of a course and a rope or cord, thus bringing out the material sense of this term in a manner that, it is hoped, will be followed with respect to other items of Qur'ānic terminology which are usually given etherealised, sublimated and metaphorical senses. For the evidence, see *ibid.*, *passim*, al-Suyūṭī, *al-Hay'a*, § 1.8, and Q, 10.38, 15.22, 36.40, 37.40, 85.18. Chabbi (*Seigneur* and *Coran*, *passim*) brings out a similar, concretely naturalistic sensibility of Qur'ānic vocabulary throughout, in a most instructive manner.

⁴⁴⁷ See the remarks on chronology of Bevan, 'Ascension', 53, 56.

Theophanic transfiguration here creates a problem for research. One would need to wonder how the motif of a deity making himself visible in anthropomorphic form emerged. Invocations of the Old Testament are comparatively indicative, but do not of necessity reveal historical connections. Evidence from Arabian precedent indicates communication with the supernatural through the hearing of voices, generally disembodied and ventriloqually delivered, or by a variety of signs, including oneiric apparitions. But we have seen a whole charmed world of transformations and transfigurations, of shifting media of representation including the iconic, sympathetic displacements, and jinnic transmogrification, which could be counted as an elementary form of epiphany. Whatever the source of textual inspiration, both Qur'anic phraseology and its anthropological substrate imply God's theophany.⁴¹⁸

The third, allusive, vision (Q, 17.1) concerns Muḥammad's Ascension or Heavenly Journey.⁴¹⁹ This mentions the One who conveyed His worshipper ('*abd*') from the Sacred Masjīd (*al-masjīd al-ḥarām*) to the Farthest Masjīd (*al-masjīd al-aqṣā*). There seems to be little doubt that the former location is Mecca, probably the sanctuary, although some scholars have taken the beginning of the journey to have been Muḥammad's home, one of the locations that appear in later traditions,⁴²⁰ but there seems little reason to expect the Qur'ān to indicate precise geographical locations.⁴²¹ The Farthest Masjīd has been taken, following classical Muslim scholarship, to be Jerusalem.⁴²² Yet in all, considering this to be an allusively visionary verse rests on the interpretation of late Muslim traditions concerning Muḥammad's nocturnal journey to the seven heavens after prayers in Jerusalem in the company of other prophets,⁴²³ ultimately for an interview with God, and on this score alone it cannot detain us here. All that

⁴¹⁸ Van Ess, 'Mi'rāḡ', 31.

⁴¹⁹ On the various interpretations available in scholarship, see Gilliot, 'Coran 17', 1–26. The recent work of Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*, 2 ff. and *passim*, is concerned not with historical reconstruction or with drawing conclusions in the manner of the history of religion, but with the later formation of Muḥammad's image. On the luxuriantly elaborated picture of Muḥammad's Ascension in comprehensive compass, *SH*, 1.514 ff.

⁴²⁰ For instance, Busse, 'Jerusalem', 21.

⁴²¹ Chabbi, *Coran*, 252 f. WAQ, 958 f., spoke rather arbitrarily of *al-masjīd al-aqṣā* at al-Ju'rāna, just outside Mecca, where Muḥammad prayed.

⁴²² Such is the force of scholarly consensus that one scholar accused another of breaking the boundaries of common wisdom for doubting that Jerusalem was involved in this story: Horovitz, 'Himmelfahrt', 162, on Schrieke, 'Himmelreise', 13 and *passim*. Bevan ('Ascension', 54, 56 f.), who considered Jerusalem in this connection to be at best 'a plausible guess', indicated that, over a millennium ago, al-Ṭabarī was reticent about this identification of Jerusalem. See van Ess, 'Mi'rāḡ', 46.

⁴²³ On the development of these traditions, see Busse, 'Jerusalem', 28 ff.

can be said here is that Jerusalem was an unlikely destination,⁴²⁴ and that this matter was connected, in Muslim traditions, with an early echo of yet another encounter with God.

This was indeed a period in Muḥammad's ministry during which angels, deities, and indeed the *jinn*, were not as yet properly disengaged and had not as yet crystallised as differentiated categories of the supernatural, and during which the angels had not as yet taken a coherent Biblicising character.⁴²⁵ The old Arab terminology of inspiration by the *jinn* is clearly persistent throughout the Qur'ān and in later Muslim traditions, and can be seen in competition with emergent, biblical models, as has long been realised.⁴²⁶ Muslim traditions attributed inspiration to Gabriel, and allocated the initial inspiration to the 'cave' at Ḥirā', all the while filling their accounts with much anthropomorphic representation of the archangel. Nevertheless, they described Muḥammad's physical condition in moments of inspiration, such as trembling, perspiration and dread, in terms familiar from the *kuḥhān* who received inspiration from the *jinn*.⁴²⁷

One may also accept an early date for the legend of the purification of Muḥammad's heart by angels, for which there is no evidence in the Qur'ān or in Arabic beliefs that I have been able to unearth, but which is nevertheless richly textured in later traditions. It may carry the echo of a prophetic initiation reminiscent of biblical prophets (for instance, Ezekiel 1–3 and Isaiah 6) and other anthropologically analogous paradigms,⁴²⁸ and indeed of a similar story concerning Umayya b. Abī al-Salt. Many of these involved Ascension, and one interpretation of Muslim traditions has it that yet another form of initiation may have been perceived, at the hands of an angel who anointed Muḥammad, or used the rite involving water that was noted in connection with the conclusion of alliances among the Arabs.⁴²⁹ And one can indeed, on the assumption that this rite of

⁴²⁴ Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 188, 521–3 nn. 245, 247. ⁴²⁵ See Chabbi, *Coran*, 83 ff.

⁴²⁶ Goldziher, *Abhandlungen*, 4, who also suggests plausibly that some pagan Arab beliefs in the *jinn* were transferred to the *sakīna* (at 198). See also Jeffery, *Qur'an as Scripture*, 57 f.; Chabbi, *Coran*, 92.

⁴²⁷ For instance, *SII*, §§ 140, 190; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.3 f.; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Hawāṭif*, no. 1 and *passim*; cf. Chabbi, *Coran*, 69 f. Schrieke ('Himmelreise', 21 ff., 25 n.) brings out anthropological parallels with both veterotestamental visions and with 'shamanism', the latter clearly understood as a generic category, which it is not. But the comparison is nevertheless salient, despite the complaint of Horovitz ('Himmelfahrt', 165 – *contra* Schrieke, 'Himmelreise') that gaps in historical material should not be filled with ethnographic parallels.

⁴²⁸ See especially Schrieke, 'Himmelreise', 21, but note the anthropology employed, more consonant with concepts used in the early twentieth century than with those that developed later.

⁴²⁹ Horovitz, 'Himmelfahrt', 171 f., who also notes purification of the heart by eagles and other birds: eagles are often associated with deity, and birds, as we have seen, have been associated with the *jinn*. For the theme of angelic initiation, see al-Sa'fī, *al-Qurbān*, 134 ff.

passage may have been connected with Muḥammad's Ascension and with Q, 17.1,⁴³⁰ conclude that the elusive passage in Q, 17.1 rested on a concrete vision.

⁴³⁰ Horovitz, 'Himmelfahrt', 169, agreeing with Schrieke, 'Himmelreise', 6 ff., 9 n. 2, against which see Busse, 'Jerusalem', 25.

CHAPTER 6

Paleo-Islam I *Charismatic polity*

The previous chapter discussed the emergence of a new, exclusive deity and the creation of a novel cultic association for its worship. The expansive momentum thus emerging deployed political, social and military means to create, secure and maintain a number of *points of accumulation*, yielding a vectorial movement out of which a new religion and a new political order were to be forged.

It is these points of accumulation, and their conformation as a sustainable historical movement powered by political and military expansion, that constitute Paleo-Islam as both a socio-religious phenomenon and a distinct historical period. As understood here, Muḥammadan Paleo-Islam does not designate a doctrine or a stage in an ineluctable doctrinal development, although what minimal credal content it had was largely unfamiliar to contemporaries and difficult to accept by them.¹ In religious terms, Paleo-Islam designates an evolving repertoire of ritual, doctrinal and mythical possibilities; it was a regime of exploration, innovation, adaptation, adjustment and assimilation, specific to a time and place. Elements later hardened into fixed doctrinal positions and standard rituals, ultimately as inflexible as rituals need to be – in the fullness of time, these together became traditions. Paleo-Islam is the emergent condition of the new religion prior to its exegetical and doctrinal elaboration, and prior to the social and political conditions of dominion that made such a durable elaboration and crystallisation possible. To this extent, this term is preferable to ‘early Islam’, an expression looking backwards from an accomplished condition and subtended by an assumption of too tidy a linear inevitability.²

¹ Q. 6.7 states that Muḥammad’s adversaries would not believe the teachings of the Qur’ān, even if revelation were to be sent down on parchment they could touch with their own hands. Watt (*Muhammad at Mecca*, 124 f.) underlines how difficult it was for the Meccans to believe in the resurrection and the restoration of mouldering bodies.

² Imbert (‘Islam des pierres’, 62) is well aware of the relative autonomy of what is here called Paleo-Islam as a historical category, but foreshortens the period by designating it as pre-dynastic.

The lynchpin of this period in Arabian history and of the movement that animated its transformations was the person of Muḥammad (c. 570–632) and the clearly extraordinary charisma exuded by his presence and his actions. By all accounts, his was an ‘intensely personal’ leadership,³ and Paleo-Islam could quite properly be called Muḥammadanism. Muḥammad’s centrality, for all the obscure patina of his personality and the difficulties of characterising it, despite the glimpses from that primary ego-document which is the Qur’ān and other sources, is evident, and is a textbook illustration of charismatic authority in action as described by Weber. He bore and conveyed massive agency, ultimately with world-historical consequences. Muḥammad emerges both as typical of his time and place, and highly distinctive, reclaiming and reconfiguring Arabs of the Ḥijāz, marshalling them with a coherence potentially novel, in new directions ultimately to merge with matters typical of lands eventually conquered by Arabs.

Muḥammad created a movement which was ultimately to triumph, against many odds, and supplied it with an emblem, the Qur’ān, that was to be one of the most durable monuments of the Arabic language: a monument carrying the *vox dei* as enunciated and certified by a vehicle thereby made charismatic. This Muḥammadan vehicle, initially a Warner and seer of calamities, was to become the recipient of what was eventually to be a far more systematic project of founding a new religion. Specific responses to Arabian conditions and expression by Arab means were, with time, to be over-coded by echoes, which might for convenience be identified as biblical, of the religious developments of Late Antiquity in ambient lands.

But clearly, for all of Muḥammad’s use of existing ways and means in the construction and consolidation of his movement around the nucleus of a new cultic association, there was a sense of novelty, of a new beginning, that he imparted to the self-perception of Paleo-Muslims. It was upon this novelty that the neat division between Islam and what came before it was later to be premised and elaborated. The preceding period was designated *jāhiliyya*, commonly rendered as ‘age of ignorance’. But of course the term has uses and contexts more complex in the Qur’ān than scholarship is usually content with, and there is no reason to suppose that the term was then used in a set terminological sense,⁴ rather than as a generic term

³ Well noted by Donner, *Muhammad*, 97. Cook (‘Prophet Muḥammad’, 26) describes Muḥammad as a ‘micromanager’.

⁴ Al-Raḥmūnī, ‘Maḥmūd al-jāhiliyya’, 83 ff.; Sells, ‘*Qasīda*’, 313 f. The term occurs in the Qur’ān only in Muḥammad’s Medinan period, four times, with reference to foregone opinions (Q, 3.154), to women’s makeup that should be avoided by the Apostle’s wives (Q, 33.32 f.), in the political sense of blind partisanship (Q, 48.26), and with reference to Christian and Jewish attitudes (Q, 5.50 f.).

for historical obsolescence. It is a term with a most interesting social and cultural history, and its interpretation as conveying a sense of barbarism appears far too peremptory,⁵ as is the attempt to show that it involved a clean break, emblematised by the famous distinction between *muruwwa* and *dīn*, signified by an 'unbridgeable gulf' between the Arabs' ethos and customs, and Muḥammad's alleged ethical teachings, between his demands and the natural freedom and pride of the Arabs.⁶

The following pages will have much to say about Paleo-Muslim continuities and transformations. Among other things, it will emerge that it is perhaps more useful to speak of pre-Umayyad Arabia than of pre-Islamic Arabia,⁷ but terminological conventions are extraordinarily resilient. Let it be signalled here that one of the most lasting features of the Paleo-Muslim sense of novelty was that its polity regarded itself as commencing a new epoch, and took the unprecedented step of marking its beginnings with a new calendar, the Hijra calendar commencing in 622,⁸ introduced by 'Umar c. 637, although some reports relate that the initiative was Muḥammad's.⁹ That it was regarded early on as in some way universal, or at least imperial, is shown by its earliest use in Greek papyrus of AH 22/AD 643, and by a Nestorian author in AH 63.¹⁰

Muḥammad and his people

Paleo-Islam was a double process, of inclusion into and exclusion from the ambit of an embryonic cultic association, powered by an emergent charismatic polity drawing sustenance from Muḥammad's seemingly inexhaustible vatic charisma, bearing an acute sense of mission and purpose combined with a keen sense for the exercise of power. This charisma was magnified and emblematised in the language of the Qur'ān, and sustained by Muḥammad's artful political and organisational dexterity.

⁵ As with Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, 204 ff. See the comments of Sells, 'Qaṣida', 315, 313 ff.

⁶ Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, 21 ff., 27 ff.

⁷ This is suggested almost in passing by Silverstein, *Postal Systems*, 42 n. 200. The matter invites deliberate attention in the context of the evolution of Umayyad polity, where one might propose the idea of the End of an Era in the course of Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik's reign between 724 and 743 (Blankinship, *Jihad State*, 6, 9, 230 ff.), which seems to have accentuated a certain structural fragility, well described, not without somewhat enthusiastic exaggeration, by Humphreys, *Mu'awiya*, 96 ff.

⁸ The Meccans knew of the Seleucid calendar, in addition to dating by significant events: Nagel, *Mohammed*, 98 f., 810 n. 246. This calendar, perhaps the most ubiquitous in Antiquity and Late Antiquity, was the only one that had an erratically comparable purchase like that of the Hijra.

⁹ TAB, 355.

¹⁰ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 180, 193 n. 69, 547-8 n. 13; Noth, *Historical Tradition*, 40; Meimaris, 'Arab era', 184.

Yet for all this, one needs to inquire if Muḥammad may be considered to have been the founder of the Islam that ultimately emerged from his Paleo-Islam.¹¹ It may be an exaggeration to claim that there is no reason to suppose that Muḥammad, the founder and lynchpin of Paleo-Islam, had a rigorous and 'distinct notion of the existence of a religious system called Islam',¹² but one needs nevertheless to guard against presumptions of inevitability, and of historical interpretations *ex eventu* overall. Briefly and in anticipation, it can be stated here that the movement inaugurated and sustained by Muḥammad expansively was not, by the time of his death, durably structured in an altogether self-sustaining manner, and that this capacity for self-sustenance needed to await the wars of the Ridda for crystallisation. Beyond western and, increasingly, northern Arabia, horizons before the Ridda were as yet vague and largely local.

The historiographical, chronological and thematic category Paleo-Islam at once avoids any imputation of inevitability and preserves the historical distinctiveness of this period of rapid transformation. Donner is well aware of this, and has proposed the terms 'Community of Believers', 'Believers Movement' or the 'believerish' phase. But these suggestions seem to weigh the phenomenon towards doctrine rather than towards chronology, without due regard to ambiguities and ambivalences highlighted in the previous chapter.¹³ The point being made might be sustained by a brief consideration of terms employed for the designation of Paleo-Islam and Paleo-Muslims. In the Qur'ān, Muḥammad's followers were referred to sometimes as *Muslimūn*, occasionally as *Ḥunafā'*, but most frequently as *Mu'minūn* (Q, 10.105, 21.108, 43.5, 68.35 and *passim*),¹⁴ an *umma* of Muḥammad, his people.¹⁵ The very common supposition, based on later elaboration, that *Islām* and *Īmān* were synonymous cannot be seriously entertained,¹⁶ the terms being distinct although they were sometimes used

¹¹ Van Ess, 'Siegel', 55. ¹² Bravmann, *Spiritual Background*, 25.

¹³ Donner, *Muhammad, passim* (preceded, at greater length, by Donner, 'From believers', followed by 'Qur'ānicization', § 5), where the author, rather abstractly, anachronistically and without justification in my view, considered this movement to have been non-denominational and non-confessional or, in current parlance, 'inclusive'.

¹⁴ This point has been made before: Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 150; Donner, *Muhammad*, 57, who cites some seventy-five occurrences for *Muslim* and related words, as against around 1,000 for *Mu'min*.

¹⁵ Cf. Chabbi, *Coran*, 148 ff., 316 ff.

¹⁶ Donner, *Muhammad*, 57. Serjeant ('*Sunnah jāmi'ah*', 13) realised that this synonymy is a later development. See, for instance, Wensinck, *Muslim Creed*, 22. Haußig (*Religionsbegriff*, ch. 5, *passim*) discusses the terms *Islām*, *Īmān* and *dīn* in detail, but unfortunately remains inconclusive in that he does not draw consequences from the performative use of these terms in the Paleo-Muslim period, and confines the discussion to philological considerations. This distinction was very well known in classical Muslim letters and is not a discovery of modern scholarship; it is massively documented by Bishāra, *al-Dīn*, 305 ff.

interchangeably.¹⁷ Which of these terms referred to personal confession – in itself a dubious notion in this context – or to membership in the new cultic association, and which to political allegiance to Muḥammad and his Paleo-Muslims is sometimes a confusing matter. But it is often clear that the term *Mu'minūn* implied both religious (in this instance, primarily cultic) and political allegiance, while *Muslimūn* often stressed the latter without necessarily implying the former.¹⁸ One need not confine oneself to tracing the earliest epigraphic or numismatic evidence for the use of the term Muslim in order to determine its previous uses,¹⁹ or to sustain the fact that Paleo-Muslims were not always designated as Muslims. What is clear from physical evidence, mainly from coins and inscriptions, is that the proclamation of Islam as the definitive name of the new faith only became irrevocably established, under imperial impetus, from 72/691–2.²⁰

The Qur'ān tells Bedouins, *al-A'rāb*, always the object of keen suspicion for Muḥammad and his followers (for instance, Q, 9.97), that they should declare themselves to have adopted not *Īmān* but rather Islam. *Īmān* was a matter of durable alliance and, possibly, of faith manifested in allegiance to Muḥammad and in the readiness for self-sacrifice signalled by a *bay'a*; Islam was a matter of alliance, however temporary (Q, 29.14–15 and cf. Q, 9.62 ff.). Moreover, the *bay'a* to Muḥammad might be a Bedouin allegiance (*bay'a a'rābiyya*), or a fully fledged alliance, *bay'at hijra*, including durable involvement with all its consequences, and can be seen to have constituted a ritual of adherence to Muḥammad's movement.²¹ The so-called Constitution of Medina was concluded between Muḥammad representing both *al-Muslimūn* and *al-Mu'minūn*, clearly distinct bodies, and other parties in Medina.²² In all cases, the person of Muḥammad, to whom allegiance was pledged, was the binding element. Its covenantal character incorporated those designated as *mu'minūn*, and consequently federated, as has

¹⁷ Izutsu, *God and Man*, 49 f.

¹⁸ One author confines the term *Mu'minūn* entirely to the political alliance aspect of the term, denoting mutual assurance of protection (de Prémare, *Ta'īs*, 103 f.). The Qur'ānic term *Islām* occurs from the late Meccan or early Medinan period (Haußig, *Religionsbegriff*, 199, 205, who also notes, at 200 and 204, that early exegesis tended to treat the word *Islām* in a verbal rather than a nominal form, and that the definitions of *Islām* in Medina were rather indistinct).

¹⁹ As with Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 8, with unwarranted conclusions drawn.

²⁰ Johns, 'Archaeology', 415, 418; Donner, *Muhammad*, 203 ff.

²¹ See Donner, *Conquests*, 79 f. The former type of *bay'a* was connected with 'Arabisation' or 're-bedouinisation', and was considered to have been a form of recidivism. See 'Athamina, 'A'rāb', 11 f. and *passim*. On *bay'a* and other Qur'ānic terms designating allegiance to Muḥammad and his movement ('*abd*', '*aqd*', '*ḥabl*', '*mithāq*'), see Marsham, *Rituals*, 41, 68 ff.

²² *SIH*, 2.106.

been noted;²³ this brings to mind the distinction between alliance and allegiance discussed above, the latter being reciprocal but unequal.²⁴ Words attributed to the Prophet make mention of *a'rāb al-muslimīn*, meaning those Bedouins who submitted to Muḥammad without *hijra* and participated in his campaigns, being thus ineligible for redistributed wealth.²⁵ This distinction between believers and their confederates continued for a considerable period. 'Uthmān addressed both parties in a tone that conveyed the sense that the *Muslimūn* were a second tier of the movement.²⁶ It persisted at least into the First Civil War, and appears in documents drafted at the Battle of Ṣiffīn in 36/657, a full quarter-century after the death of Muḥammad,²⁷ by which time socio-political horizons had expanded, the *Mu'minūn* no longer constituting the core element.²⁸

There is some slight evidence that the term *Ḥanīf* was used to designate Paleo-Muslims. A variant reading attributed to Ibn 'Abbās of the Qur'ānic verse which designates true religion in the eyes of God as Islam (Q, 3.19) uses the term *Ḥanīfiyya* instead.²⁹ This may reflect Arabian usage of the term *Ḥanīf*. But it remains the case that the synonymy of *Muslim* and *Ḥanīf* is largely the result of the elaboration of Muslim traditions.³⁰ A report transmitted by al-Zuhrī relates that Paleo-Muslims were only whimsically designated *Hunafā'* at the time of the Battle of Badr in 2/624.³¹ In the Qur'an itself, the term *Ḥanīf* occurs ten times in the singular, and twice in the plural, eight of which referred to Abraham. But there is no suggestion that it referred to an identifiable and readily recognisable group of people.

The term *Ḥanīf* has been much discussed in scholarship, and has been heavily belaboured. What scholarship seems to have overlooked is that the word has a straightforward meaning, that of curvature and twistiness, of tending away from something towards another, a tendency that with Paleo-Islam acquired a consistency of usage, a sense of adherence to something resulting from the repudiation of something previous – *taḥannaḥ^a ilā* – bringing its semantic field plausibly into that of another, *ṣābi'*, discussed below.³² That the Muḥammadan movement, without further qualification, may have been designated *Ḥanīfiyya* would make perfect sense without needing forced interpretation in terms of Syriac. If it had any specific external reference at all in the context of Muḥammad's

²³ Arjomand, 'Constitution', 561.

²⁴ See the discussion of Maršam, *Rituals*, 55 and ch. 2, *passim*, indicating the martial tone of some relevant documents.

²⁵ WAQ, 757. ²⁶ Nagel, *Mohammed*, 602 f. ²⁷ TAB, 901. ²⁸ Nagel, *Mohammed*, 633 f.

²⁹ Jeffery, *Materials*, 32. ³⁰ Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 16.

³¹ WAQ, 120. ³² 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 6.454.

movement and the Qur'ān that accompanied its formation, the term *Ḥanīf* may have referred rather vaguely to gentiles ready for guidance,³³ the sense that the Syriac term *hanpa* had acquired after a long and complex evolution following its original designation of pagans for Syrian Christians.³⁴

Finally, it might be added that there is evidence for the use, both neutral and disparaging, of the term *Ṣābi* for Paleo-Muslims, including the verbal form *ṣaba'a*,³⁵ conveying a general sense of 'conversion', sometimes, according to the context of use, the negative connotation of a renegade and a turncoat.³⁶ The term appears in the Qur'ān three times (Q, 2.63, 5.72, 22.17) together with the Jews and Christians, benignly in the first two occurrences and in a hostile manner in the third, but has been clearly misinterpreted both by medieval Muslims and by modern scholarship, which has made the most tenuous proposal that it designated gnostics or Mandaean baptists.³⁷

But clearly the term, which may well have been used in Muḥammad's time in the same generic sense for any person tending away from something, and was somewhat cognate with *Ḥanīf*,³⁸ was contested, misunderstood or unclear, perhaps because of its vagueness and use in disparagement. 'Umar is reported to have said that he was a Muslim rather than a *Ṣābi*.³⁹ During

³³ Griffith, 'Prophet', 118 ff.

³⁴ See especially de Blois, 'Naṣrānī', 16 f., 18 f., 23 f., building on older scholarship not much quoted (24–5 nn. 120–4), and answering satisfactorily the perplexity of Rippin, 'RḤMN', 167, who noted the positive use of a term not uncommonly used by Christians in a pejorative sense – a use that persisted, and is evident in an early Christian apology written in Arabic, held at St Catherine's monastery in Sinai (Samir, 'Earliest', 104). In the late seventh century, the Christian poet al-Akḥṭal referred to his Muslim competitor al-Farazdaq as a *Ḥanīfī* (AGH, 8.227). This would suggest that the surmise of Sprenger (*Leben*, 1.43), that the *Ḥunafā'* not only were a sect but were in fact Essenes who had lost virtually all knowledge of the Bible, is entirely fanciful, along with other such suggestions plentifully available in modern scholarship. Saleh ('Etymological fallacy', 673) proposes the possibility of derivation from Nabataean, and Faris and Glidden ('Meaning of the koranic *Ḥanīf*', 3 f., 11 ff.) propose that the expression is associated with abstention from wine, in connection with a teetotal Nabataean deity (whether the teetotal be the deity or a reference to the lack of libations of wine is not made clear by the authors), and with the opposition, in some poetry, between Christians and *Ḥanīfs*.

³⁵ SII, §§ 213, 223, 318.

³⁶ Wellhausen (*Reste*, 237) held this designation to have been the first name used by pagans for Muḥammad's followers, basing his view on the concordant evidence of Arabic sources.

³⁷ Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 192; de Blois, 'Sabians', 40, 44 ff. Tardieu ('Sabiens', 27 f., 42) takes the Qur'ānic reference to be to Palestinian Gnostics, whatever these may have been, and seeks the etymology of the term in the Greek *stratīotikoi*, worshippers of the heavenly host – see 'Ṣābi'a', EI, 8.675 ff. On later uses of *Ṣābi'a* to refer to Ḥarrānian pagans, see Gündüz, *Knowledge of Life*, 29 ff., a matter complicated by the fact that Ḥarrān pagans had called themselves *hanṣe*: Segal, 'Pagan Syriac monuments', 108, 110.

³⁸ MbS, 1.112. Cf. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Radd*, 455. The connection between these two terms was already sensed a century ago by Margoliouth: 'Harranians', ERE, 6.520.

³⁹ SII, § 226.

a campaign by Khālīd b. al-Walīd against the B. Jadhīma, defeated enemies sought, to no avail, to declare their adhesion to the faith of the victor by saying they had become *Ṣābīs*,⁴⁰ clearly intending the political sense of Islam as discussed above, and implying they had corrected their old ways. The comforting proposal that the term designated converts in a general sense⁴¹ is certainly plausible, and is sustained by the sparse occurrences of the word.

What might be concluded is that there seems not to have been a definitively binding terms by which Paleo-Muslims referred to themselves, or were referred to by others. This was clearly attendant upon a situation which will have appeared confusing and unfamiliar, at a time when what was to become a new religion was yet to define itself in a durable manner. The term *umma* was used generically to designate any group of people, long before the sense of divine Election acquired a terminological sense.⁴² On the other hand, our sources are replete with socio-ethnographic markers with reference to Muḥammad's followers, most saliently in the Medinan period *Muhājirūn* (Meccan immigrants in Medina) and *Anṣār* (Medinan allies of Paleo-Muslims), to which in the context of the military conflicts were added the tribal names of those fighting on Muḥammad's side, with only Muḥammad's enemies, the Mushrikūn, having a generic designation, at least on the part of the Qur'an.

All this highlights a condition of incipience. Nevertheless, the Paleo-Muslim movement can be further specified, beyond the name given to it by itself or by outsiders, by looking at its concrete workings. The Constitution of Medina was concluded, on one side, not by the *Muslimūn* and the *Mu'minūn* in general, but specifically those *Mu'minūn* and *Muslimūn* of Quraysh and of Medina, and those who attached themselves to them and fought alongside them.⁴³ The arrangement was made under the aegis and guidance of Muḥammad who, like God, remained in many ways above the agreement, as its regulator and guardian. As always in situations where alliances were concluded,⁴⁴ parties to such agreements were clans and sections. Muḥammad's party was, in this context, construed operationally after the political model of a clan.⁴⁵ The same document refers

⁴⁰ 'ṣaba'nā, ṣaba'nā': al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 5.203.

⁴¹ De Blois, 'Sabians', 51. However, the author's contention (49 f.) that the term designated Manichaeans is based on an unconvincing interpretation of the evidence.

⁴² Cf. Chabbi, *Coran*, 148 ff. ⁴³ *SIH*, 2.106.

⁴⁴ Marsham (*Rituals*, 43) correctly maintains that the Constitution of Medina resembles *ḥilf* agreements in many respects.

⁴⁵ Cf. Noth, 'Früher Islam', 28 ff.

to specific Jewish clans allied to the Paleo-Muslims as 'an *umma* together with *al-Mu'minūn*'.⁴⁶ These Jews, such as those attached to Muḥammad's maternal uncles, the B. al-Najjār, were clients of other Arab groups.⁴⁷ Yet all were party to the designations *Mu'minūn* and *Muslimūn*, indicating a considerable degree of plasticity regarding the religious composition of Muḥammad's commonwealth, his *umma*, each party entitled to maintain adherence to its own *dīn*, 'religion' broadly considered within its social and cultic context. The overall context was that of a political organism based on a pact of mutual and collective security whose sense is conveyed by the term *Mu'minūn*.⁴⁸

The antonym of *īmān* is *kufṛ*, designating resistance, ingratitude and disobedience.⁴⁹ In a situation of evolving monotheism, we need to be wary of doctrinal over-interpretation in seeking to chart the political and infrastructures of Paleo-Islam and of the Paleo-Muslims. That Muḥammad's commonwealth had little problem with Medinan polytheists, at least initially, is noteworthy,⁵⁰ in order to gain an appreciation of this arrangement over and above what might be conveyed by a retrojection of criteria of faith onto the historical notions of *Islām* and *Īmān*. That this situation reflected the complex and heterogenous situation in Medina, and that the constitution of a commonwealth in the abode of Muḥammad's *hijra* cannot be seen as a smooth transition, requires equally explicit note.⁵¹

⁴⁶ *SIH*, 2.107.

⁴⁷ Wellhausen, 'Constitution', 130; Rubin, 'Constitution', 8 f., who notes that the division among clans mentioned in the Constitution was territorial; Arjomand, 'Constitution', 558.

⁴⁸ Rubin, 'Constitution', 13 ff., and 14, 19 f., where the author notes how later generations manipulated this material or suppressed some of it, producing a reading of history more readily linear. Care needs to be taken against the altogether common, anachronistic over-interpretation of *īmān* as 'faith' or 'belief', as with Rubin, 'Constitution', 13 and Donner, *Muhammad*, 73.

⁴⁹ Khan, *Exegetischen Teile*, 267.

⁵⁰ Wellhausen, 'Constitution', 130; Noth, 'Früher Islam', 33. Also noteworthy is the fact that not all groups in Medina were party to the Commonwealth. With regard to a number of major Jewish clans, it has been suggested (Donner, *Muhammad*, 73) that this may either have been the result of the loss of earlier versions of the Constitution, or that they were dropped from later redactions. Important in this regard is that the Constitution of Medina was, in all likelihood, a composite document (noted already by Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 226) in three versions, reflecting responses to an evolving political situation in the town: Arjomand, 'Constitution', 560 and 556 ff., who also gives a translation and commentary of the document (562 ff.). Lecker (*Constitution*) tends to view it as a unified document, providing the Arabic texts and translations of its various versions and variants (ch. 1) and arguments for and against its composite nature (Appendix B). All agree that the text is very early Medinan (Lecker, *Constitution*, 182). Humphreys (*History*, 92 ff.) provides a sound picture of earlier scholarship.

⁵¹ Noth, 'Früher Islam', 33 f. The Qur'ān attests to the complexity of the situation in Medina and the existence of enemies within, even within individual families, and warns recalcitrants darkly that God is present in every secret conclave: Bell, *Commentary*, 2.358 f., 390. On local alliances during Muḥammad's early Medinan period, and their subsequent development, see Nagel, *Mohammed*, 454 ff.

Muḥammad's *hijra* may have been the first movement so called, and it was to become both generic and emblematic of a broader tendency to join his commonwealth. Paradigmatic and exemplary as it was, this *hijra* was not unique, and was an injunction to repetition and emulation. Outside Arabia, alongside the earlier Syriac terms used for Arabs, Arbāyē and Tayyāyē, Muhājirūn, in the form *Mhaggrāyē*, was by 640 to be applied to the earlier Arabs of the Muḥammadan period and that immediately following; the Greek equivalent *Magaritai* comes into evidence on a bilingual papyrus of 643.⁵² This doubtless indicates echoes of the use by some *Muhājirūn* (the term occurs in official documents of the first Hijra century) for self-designation,⁵³ once the notion of the *hijra* had acquired broader remit.⁵⁴ The term appears in the sense of joining Muḥammad's emergent commonwealth.⁵⁵ But there was clearly a lack of a common denominator; Thomas the Presbyter (fl. c. 640), with reference to events in Palestine in 634, spoke quite simply of Muḥammad's Tayyāyē, *Tayyāyē d-Mḥmt*,⁵⁶ but it must be conceded that the former term was in any case more common in Syria than in Iraq. The sole common denominator, also used in Syriac, was quite simply ethnic, Arab, rather than Muslim.⁵⁷

In all cases, outside the context of political allegiance signalled by terms used for self-designation and for designation by outsiders, boundaries of religion were not well defined, apart from the performance of ritual drill and commitment to certain financial obligations, as we shall see, although later traditions Islamise much earlier history retroactively – ritual drill amplifies solidarities and loyalties by rendering them regularly visible. A letter attributed to Muḥammad states that a Muslim is he who performs a number of ritual – cultic – observances, though he be a Magian.⁵⁸ Whatever the specific reference, the sense of this statement underlines the porous nature of boundaries over and above those of allegiance. And indeed, there is evidence not only that the terms themselves were unclear, but that the doxological requirements for adhesion to the body of Paleo-Muslims were often minimal, and highly political. Muḥammad maintained throughout an alliance with sections of Khuzā'a, on the edge of whose territory he was born, a relationship inherited from his grandfather 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. After the renewal of this alliance at al-Ḥudaybiyya, he intervened on their behalf

⁵² Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 148, 179 n. 23.

⁵³ Griffith, 'Prophet', 122 ff.; Saadi, 'Nascent Islam', 218 f.; Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 8; Hoyland, 'Content and context', 91 n. 89. On the *hijra* as a concept of 'mobilisation' and a tally of its uses, justifiably questioning whether the notion was originally applied exclusively to Medina, see Crone, 'First-century concept'.

⁵⁴ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 180.

⁵⁵ For instance, WAQ, 745, 750, 757.

⁵⁶ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 120.

⁵⁷ Cf. Brock, 'Syriac views', 14. ⁵⁸ US, § 453.

after they were attacked by B. Bakr (he had grown up in their territory as an infant), although their leader Budayl had in all likelihood not 'converted' until after the conquest of Mecca.⁵⁹

This situation was to continue. The Christian Imru' al-Qays b. 'Adi al-Kalbī, upon his conversion at the hands of 'Umar, was immediately put in command of Qudā'a Muslims of Syria even before he had performed a single prayer prostration.⁶⁰ Indeed, there is no reason to suppose that credal conversion, even to the cult of Allāh, was a matter that was accomplished early in any comprehensive way. Inscriptions on rock faces outside Mecca show that, into the second century of the Hijra, ordinary individuals were still making declarations of belief in Allāh,⁶¹ and even these have been interpreted as indicating, not the exultation of conversion, but the choice of a particular, new deity.⁶² In pockets such as those attested in the Negev, such professions of faith appear only indeterminately monotheistic.⁶³

As a result of the foregoing, it seems that the most useful model for the description and interpretation of Paleo-Islam would be one that focuses on a constellation of strategic points of accumulation, the accumulation of socio-political force and cultic coherence, whose ultimate product was to be an irreversible process of elaborating a new religion in the context of an emergent polity, ultimately an empire with an oecumenical vocation, perhaps as an unintended consequence. This process, which involved cult, myth and scripture, and later dogma, as well as a socio-political course of control and incorporation through mechanisms of alliance (including war), was fashioned from material in place in line with the discussion of foregoing chapters.

Scatterings of creed

It would be instructive to consider what it was of the emergent new religion that was being circulated, and certain means of circulating religious goods in so far as these are identifiable. As might be expected from the foregoing discussion, the Paleo-Muslim notion of divinity was not altogether

⁵⁹ See Rubin, 'Barā'a', 24 f.; Nagel, *Mohammed*, 99 f.

⁶⁰ *AGH*, 16.94, allowance being made for a little exaggeration. Agha (*Revolution*, 159 ff.) shows in detail how, even much later, conditions for conversion were scaled down considerably as the so-called Abbasid Revolution was mobilising armies in Iran. One might recall that, in 858, the Roman emperor Michael III had the lay civil servant Photius rushed through all levels of the clergy during a period of five days, and then duly installed as Patriarch.

⁶¹ Al-Rashid, *Kitābāt islāmiyya min Makka*, nos. 1, 3, 7, 8, 10, 16, 23, 27, 31, 32, 34, 39, 43, 44, 52, 53, 56. The same phenomenon on rock graffiti is evident elsewhere in the Hijāz, Najrān, western Najd and the area of Khaybar: Grohmann, *Expedition*, nos. 231, 33, 34, 39, 40, 43, 46, 53, 165, 170a.

⁶² Imbert, 'Islam des pierres', 69. ⁶³ Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads*, 197.

consistent, and had yet to enter the moulds of theological sublimation, doxological expression, interpretation and mythological elaborations available in the lands of late antique empire. What the creed involved was an elementary profession of allegiance to the new divinity, the abjuration of other divinities, and allegiance to Muḥammad and his dominion. Credal elements were later to congeal into the standard profession of the Muslim faith (the *shahāda*), to which was added belief in His angels, resurrection and the afterlife. This formula only appears in epigraphic evidence in any meaningful way from c. AH 70, preceded by declarations involving derivatives of *w-th-q*, semantically related to Arabian systems of alliance, and betokening invocations of a proximate deity in moments of need.⁶⁴

There were collateral conceptual implications to this, allied to the connotative expansion of Allāh. The end effect was the subordination of the natural, human and supernatural worlds to their cosmogenic and cosmocratic ruler; nature herself appeared in the course of Muḥammad's lifetime as recorded in the Qur'ān as a vast space of divine signatures. God's Signs, *āyāt*, visible in the regularity of nature in which diurnal regularity is especially signalled, were to be seen as indices of the singularly and exclusively divine. This was a deity who was the Lord and Master of things both visible and invisible, the only Master of the Unseen, *al-ghayb*,⁶⁵ who governed nature by suggestion, but, for all his transcendence, also used the sky as His mount.⁶⁶ This was a deity who declared three times that 'there is no God but I', and of whom it is said twenty-eight times that 'there is no God but He' (Q, 16.2, 20.14, 21.25; 2.255, 3.6, 18, 4.87 and *passim*). He is an anaphoric subject who recurs in the Qur'ān very frequently.

The sources do not give us a clue as to which *āyāt* may have indicated other deities, or if the term had been used by pagans at all. But it would be reasonable to assume that it was these same natural *āyāt*, and their wrathful subversion, that prompted the pagan regime of invocation and propitiation: natural prodigies, life and death, illness and healing, wealth and poverty, love and vengeance, triumph and defeat, abundance and dearth, rain and drought, and human fertility and genealogies extended,

⁶⁴ Imbert, 'Islam des pierres', 65–7.

⁶⁵ This term, for which there seems to be no evidence in ancient Arabic poetry except in the ordinary sense of 'absence' and 'departure', occurs forty-eight times in the Qur'ān in the singular and four times in the plural *ghayūb*, predominantly in Meccan *sūras* and in association with al-Raḥmān. It requires detailed investigation, beyond vague reference to unknowability and to mystery, as in 'Ghayb', *EI* and Gaudefroy-Demombynes, 'Ghayb', who includes revelation as another connotation of the word.

⁶⁶ Umayya b. Abī al-Salt, *Dīwān*, 10.23 f.

arrested or terminated. All of these *āyāt* were appropriated by Muḥammad's Lord, aggregately throughout the history of the Qur'ān and the semantic explosion of Allāh's connotations.

The new religion implied, ultimately, personal adherence as a condition for membership of an emergent sectarian community, although, as we have seen, precise conditions and boundaries were often unclear, and the political and social boundaries of the commonwealth, decisive as they were, were not initially dictated by doctrinal adhesion. Others outside, collectively and communally rather than individually, were men who had taken their fancies for deity, and had been led astray by God knowingly (Q, 45.23).⁶⁷ Muḥammad's God, now indivisibly sovereign, appointed diabolical familiars to those whom He wished to have ensnared (Q, 43.3–7). He created and regulated the order of nature, and broke it at will. He imposed upon humanity a number of tokens of obeisance of a ritual nature, some akin to veterotestamental regimes of purity and impurity. He also laid down institutes that regulated certain aspects of human relations, and a number of commands which, in the fullness of time, were made into elements of a legal order. Crucially, those outside Muḥammad's circle would respond by asserting that what stood between them and Muḥammad was their ancestral customs (Q, 1.170).

But overall, and beyond formulaic statements that betokened more ritual utterances than doctrinal substance, the credal content was meagre, and the formulaic statements characteristic of the new movement were open to all manner of possible interpretations in terms of the generally scant theological ideas in place in the newly conquered lands, senior clergy excepted. And although epigraphic evidence alone cannot be used to construe the development of Paleo-Islam in its earlier phases, it is well to indicate what wayfarers and the builders of monuments might have regarded as salient to their new religious identity.⁶⁸

In line with earlier practices, there are many invocations of divine mercy and forgiveness, and petitions to the new deity, His angels and other actors (interestingly, the *Mu'minūn*), for good measure and in the aggregative manner explored above.⁶⁹ There are many elementary professions of faith, as indicated.⁷⁰ Evident in these inscriptions is the use of elements

⁶⁷ *man itakhadh^u ilāhah^u hawāh^u wa aḍallab^u l-Allāh^u 'alā 'ilmⁱⁿ wa khatam^u 'alā sama'ihⁱ wa qalbihⁱ wa ja'ala 'ala baṣarihiⁱ ghashāwat^{am}.*

⁶⁸ The early Muslim inscriptions are very well treated, comprehensively, by Hoyland, 'Content and context'.

⁶⁹ Barāmkī, 'Al-Nuqūsh', nos. 5, 6, 12, 81, 318 ff. (Syria); Grohmann, *Expedition*, nos. 21 ff. (Hijāz).

⁷⁰ See also Grohmann, *Expedition*, nos. 233, 238, 239.

from Qur'ānic pericopes, mostly relating to the attributes of God, and invocations of the God of Moses, Aaron, Muḥammad and Abraham.⁷¹ Some are extra-Qur'ānic but nevertheless convey a sense of ritual activity, with formulaic associations with Greek, Thamūdīc, Nabataean and Safaitic inscriptions,⁷² including a curse, expressed, under new circumstances, in the form of an appeal to God not to forgive a certain 'Ubayd,⁷³ and much use of the first person singular *anā*, marking passage in an epigraphic universe still only minimally religious in tone and content.⁷⁴ These inscriptions clearly indicate an emergent common vocabulary of prayer and supplication, in mood and purpose continuous with what came before. In all, it appears that the earliest credal statements that display the evolving form of Paleo-Muslim religion were expressed not so much in the form of dogmatic elaboration, but occurred in the context of litanies and other formulae, some of a liturgical character, in some instances reminiscent of Christian liturgy of the time. The Qur'ān excluded, the earliest extant integrated credal statement of the Paleo-Muslim epoch is probably the long inscription at Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock (elements of which were concordant with formulae found on the earliest Umayyad epigraphic coins).⁷⁵

And if one moved on to the general diffusion of the new vocabulary of Qur'ānic pericopes as exemplified in, for instance, the poetry of Dhū'r Rumma, one would find little doctrinal content, but nevertheless extensive metaphorical use of what are identifiably Paleo-Muslim credal elements used to convey intentions that are primarily poetical.⁷⁶ In all, we see the growth of a homogeneous idiom which betokened what must have been some degree of deliberate control and instruction from the centres of power and of doctrine; it is interesting to note that phrases tend to appear in graffiti a couple of decades after they were used in Umayyad imperial inscriptions.⁷⁷ One might also register the persistence of invocations of the Fates and *al-dahr* in elegiac poetry.⁷⁸ The *jinn*, with their position in the

⁷¹ Rostem, *Rock Inscriptions*, 24; Grohmann, *Paläographie*, DKI 163 (Karbālā', AH 64); *RCEA*, no. 10 (Jerusalem, AH 72), no. 18 (Damascus, AH 86); Nevo, and Koren, *Crossroads*, 380 ff. (Negev).

⁷² Hoyland, 'Content and context', 88 ff. ⁷³ Barāmkī, 'Al-Nuqūsh', no. 58.

⁷⁴ Imbert, 'Islam des pierres', 62 f.

⁷⁵ The text: *RCEA*, no. 9 and Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, Appendix B and 59 ff. (translation); analysis and discussion: 65 ff.

⁷⁶ Āghā, *Dhū'r-Rumma*, 139 ff., 143. ⁷⁷ Hoyland, 'Content and context', 91 f.

⁷⁸ For instance, and most famously and movingly, the elegy of Abū Dhū'ayb al-Hudhālī (d. c. 648), who participated in the early north African conquests and died in Egypt, for his five sons, all lost to the plague during the second decade of the *hijra*: *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, 126.1, 8, 9, 14, 16. This elegy is discussed in detail by Tamer, *Zeit*, 116 ff.

formal economy of the divine revised, were everywhere, delivering their *hawātif* and lamentations.⁷⁹ Like customary alliances, these beings were not residual, nor could they be termed 'survivals', but were well-integrated constituents of the emergent regime as they were of the old.

Confederation and dominion

There is little wonder that Muḥammad faced such resistance, in which were combined the question of cultic authority and legitimacy with issues of political control over claims for legitimacy. Clearly, once his divided heart had been recomposed determinedly towards the end of the Meccan period of his career, Muḥammad was intent on vying subversively with cultic arrangements in place, and consequently with issues of political control. The emergence of a new and increasingly exclusivist order was yet to create its own durable conditions of social embeddedness. What mattered to Muḥammad's adversaries was not so much the novelty of a deity as the extraction of individuals from their customary and communal contexts of worship, and their translation beyond the embedded and congenital nature of the profuse cults in place. This implied a transfer of social solidarity from the established social contexts of cult to new arrangements of religious and social solidarity and loyalty. The appeal to individual commitment went beyond social structures in place to found a movement more elective than congenitally embedded, thus lending itself to being considered potentially subversive of social and political order overall, and to be seditious.⁸⁰ It will be suggested that Muḥammad and his followers ultimately adopted the most radical consequence of ostracism, that of founding an alternative polity with a cultic calendar that subverted the prevailing temporal rhythms upon which trans-local relations within Arabia were based.

Muḥammad drew initially, but not exclusively, on a constituency of subalterns.⁸¹ He even required a semi-clandestine location for preaching and devotions, provided by al-Arqam b. al-Arqam, reputedly the seventh adherent to his cause.⁸² Paleo-Muslims were, at least temporarily and in

⁷⁹ For instance, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Hawātif*, nos. 5, 82, 83, 86, 115 ff.

⁸⁰ Comparisons with the suppression in Rome of a Bacchic cult in 205–204 BC (Beard *et al.*, *Religions*, 92 ff.) are very striking, despite obvious differences. Cf. the attempt, preliminarily, in very broad strokes and in terms that may sound somewhat anachronistic today, to compare Mecca with Athens: Hamidullah, 'City-state'.

⁸¹ It has been noted that social distance was always maintained between Muḥammad and subalterns (the Qur'ānic *mustad'afūn*) who followed him: Nagel, *Mohammed*, 202 f.

⁸² For the Meccan setting of Muḥammad's earliest preaching, see now Nagel, *Mohammed*, 191 ff.

terms of personal commitment to Muḥammad's deity, disengaged from the agnatic context of cult, and were held by the strange notion of obedience, not to the status quo of congenital loyalty, but to Muḥammad's person and what it purported to represent.⁸³ This was especially so as he came to acquire the unfamiliar capacity of God's Apostolate,⁸⁴ in a situation where kindred blood counted for much, regarded as more precious than the deity of the kindred.⁸⁵ The Paleo-Muslim cult had no initial ancestral legitimacy and warrant,⁸⁶ and this it sought to acquire by progressive Abrahamisation, and of course by emphasis on the position of Quraysh and Mecca. That al-Mas'ūdī's ekphrasis of the images inside the Ka'ba includes the figure of Abraham, most likely included during Muḥammad's lifetime, in a Qurayshi ancestralist setting, may very well be an echo of this.

Clearly, it was not what Muḥammad may have believed that mattered. Before as well as after Muḥammad, poetry was replete with denunciation of one's *dīn*, understood as custom, with or without religious colouring.⁸⁷ Muḥammad had come to behave as if he did not belong to the Quraysh, his clan, among whom his preaching as Warner started,⁸⁸ having estranged himself from his congenital cultic association. It was not so much the introduction of the cult of Allāh that had been decisive, a cult which in the initial phase may have involved clandestine worship of the new, exotic deity, lasting until c. 620 when the first Medinan supporters and adherents were won over. It was rather Muḥammad's growing derision for the gods of Quraysh that precipitated persecution,⁸⁹ consolidated by and perhaps leading to the suspicion that the Apostle was trying to forge an alliance with the Ethiopians against his own people.⁹⁰ His not altogether successful attempts to gain adherents at the markets of 'Ukāz, al-Mijannā and Dhū'l-Majāz and,⁹¹ perhaps worse still, his unsuccessful attempt to win over Thaqīf, allies of Quraysh, and later the B. Shaybān north of Medina, were part of this package of sedition and suspicion. Clearly, Muḥammad was desacralising the Meccan sacred, and used his sacrilege to sacralise his own transgression.⁹²

⁸³ On Qur'ānic commands of obedience to Muḥammad: Zwettler, 'Mantic manifesto', 116 ff.

⁸⁴ Noth, 'Früher Islam', 20.

⁸⁵ Cf. Robertson Smith, *Religion*, 283. Ḥassān b. Thābit's panegyrics of Muḥammad and his followers, and his lampoons of Muḥammad's adversaries, use the poetical vocabulary and motifs common in ancient Arabic poetry, with religious themes peripheral to matters of honour and collective pride, and the derision of such.

⁸⁶ Cf. Zwettler, 'Mantic manifesto', 104 ff. ⁸⁷ Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 87 ff.

⁸⁸ Noth, 'Früher Islam', 26 f., 30 f.

⁸⁹ US, §§ 72, 89. For a rough chronology, see Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 59.

⁹⁰ Khoury, *Wabb b. Munabbih*, PB5 (34) 1–13. ⁹¹ Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, 1.184.

⁹² Cf. Bourdieu, 'Genèse', 321.

Legendary material apart, early accounts of Muḥammad's life preserve vivid and, under prevailing conditions, highly credible accounts of his ostracism by the majority of Meccans – an act which, technically, might have rendered him a *khalī* and an outlaw.⁹³ Written agreements between various segments of the Quraysh, the documents reputedly being concluded between eighty signatories,⁹⁴ were drafted and signed, banning the companionship of and commerce with Muḥammad's immediate paternal kinsmen, the Banū 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, who had assured Muḥammad protection in areas they inhabited, following hostile actions towards him and a plan to assassinate him.⁹⁵ At one point, an agreement was drafted between Quraysh and lineages outside, whereby he would be killed collectively and his blood thereby 'dispersed'.⁹⁶ Some of his followers were subjected to manifold persecution, often bodily.⁹⁷

It was as a consequence of this ostracism, and the confinement of Muḥammad and his protectors to their Meccan abodes,⁹⁸ sweetened by the offer made to Abū Ṭālib by Quraysh that he would be given a substitute son if he delivered Muḥammad to them,⁹⁹ that the Prophet then made his way to al-Ṭā'if. Following his hostile reception, he found himself vulnerable and bereft of protection even by weaker elements, captive to the microsociology of Meccan politics,¹⁰⁰ until, for reasons entirely obscure, al-Muṭ'im b. 'Adī, chief of B. Nawfal, repudiated the agreement to which he had been a signatory, and agreed to heed the call of Muḥammad for protection, now having no other alternative but to sit out the situation at Nakhla,¹⁰¹ presumably under the protection of al-'Uzzā. Once protected by al-Muṭ'im, Muḥammad repaired to that other pagan sanctuary, the Ka'ba, where he touched the Black Stone before making his way home. His *hijra* came soon thereafter, in 622,¹⁰² for, clearly,

⁹³ This also involved the chanting in Mecca of lampoons against Muḥammad: WAQ, 860.

⁹⁴ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.31, the figure of course reflecting plenty rather than precise figures, and in keeping with the normal situation in which parties to agreements were smaller lineages rather than 'tribes'.

⁹⁵ *US*, §§ 45a, 50 ff.

⁹⁶ *SIH*, 2.90 f.

⁹⁷ For instance, *US*, §§ 66 f.

⁹⁸ This confinement is variously reported to have lasted a year, two years, three years, or any number of years: Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1.177 ff.

⁹⁹ *TAB*, 335.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Akhnas b. Shurayq denied Muḥammad protection on the grounds that he was an ally of the Meccans, allies being disallowed from offering protection to those of pure blood belonging to allies; Suhayl b. 'Amr refused protection on the grounds that B. 'Āmir b. Lu'ayy did not protect persons wanted by B. Ka'b: *TAB*, 342.

¹⁰¹ Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1.181, who tends to suppress the ambivalences of al-Muṭ'im's position, and to state that Islam had 'entered his heart' as he negotiated with Muḥammad about the fate of the latter's captives at the Battle of Badr, without, however, stating that he ever converted to Muḥammad's religion: *ibid.*, 5.14. See WAQ, 110; *TAB*, 335 ff.; *SIH*, 1.17 ff., 241 f.

¹⁰² For details of the traditional picture, see Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1.193 ff.

Muḥammad's position was still precarious, and his isolation still very real and menacing.

But for all the hostility, it will emerge clearly that Muḥammad was always fixated very specifically upon the *ḥaram* of Mecca, and that he was at heart a Qurayshi to the end. His Meccan irrendentism was one of extraordinary tenacity, powered not only by a sense of ancestralist entitlement, but also by a clear appreciation of the socio-political and religious geographies of the Ḥijāz; history proved him to have been extraordinarily prescient. Having started as a Warner to his people, he concluded his worldly career with his Meccan *Anschluss*,¹⁰³ following which Quraysh were incorporated into his polity and his religion, insuring them against the worst of divine wrath, on preferential terms that were then much resented, as we shall see. Had we had access to a more precise micro-sociological knowledge of Meccan politics, we might have been able to view this entire story in terms of inner-Quraysh politics, and to explain anomalies such as the adhesion, reputedly from an early date, of the eminently patrician 'Uthmān b. 'Affān to Muḥammad's movement.

What it was that propelled Muḥammad's followers, both aristocratic and exceedingly humble, to expose themselves to the vagaries of fortune and hostility is exceedingly difficult to ascertain, and the sociology of the earliest period of Muḥammad's activity remains obscure. What can be asserted is that the 'readiness' of Mecca and the Ḥijāz for Islam, with the emergence of non-kin organisations (albeit in metaphorical terms of kinship and alliance) and a certain proto-monotheism, is much overstated, and is in large measure contradicted by fact.¹⁰⁴ Causal factors need to be sought in micro-sociological and micro-political shifts, uncertainties, enmities, compositions and recompositions, in Mecca and farther afield, which are likely to have been eddying responses to shifts in the patterns of war, commerce and the strategic disposition of surrounding late antique polities, in the capillaries of which Muḥammad's movement moved, with widening remit and ever greater force evident from the vertiginous rapidity of its consolidation.

What needs to be conceded is that the personality and genius of Muḥammad himself were crucial vectors of Paleo-Islam prior to the emergence of durable vested interests within and around this movement. This must be granted despite the later telescoping and patternings that accompanied the construal of his standard personality. But in actual fact, a fair

¹⁰³ The term was used by Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 415, 447.

¹⁰⁴ The classic synoptic statement still remains that of Wolf, 'Social organization', 329 f., 339, 348 ff., much amplified in subsequent literature.

amount of what is said of Muḥammad *ad hominem* and as founding hero cannot be taken for established,¹⁰⁵ not least matters of importance to the later elaboration of his image, relating to his genealogy, his paternity, and his age, not to speak of his wonders.¹⁰⁶

But still, there are telling details. He seems to have felt the need to defend himself against the assertion that his paternity was not entirely impeccable, and that he might have been classified by descent through his mother's line, as asserted by the south Arabian grandee al-Ash'ath b. Qays al-Kindī, or that he was born of the Arab arrangement of *nikāḥ al-maqt*, whereby a son married the erstwhile wife of his own deceased or divorced father.¹⁰⁷ Neither the suggestion nor the polemical motif would have been very unusual at the time; Muḥammad's closeness to his maternal kinsmen in Medina, B. al-Najjār, is well known and needs to be factored into interpretations of why he chose Medina for his *hijra* and how he managed to establish himself there, despite the common report that he had been called in to act as an arbitrator.

Also unremarkable – and unpolemical – was the report that one of his sons had the pagan name 'Abd Manāf and another 'Abd al-'Uzzā,¹⁰⁸ the former possibly so named after Muḥammad's uncle Abū Ṭālib, the father of 'Alī.¹⁰⁹ The name given by Tradition to Muḥammad's father, 'Abd Allāh, is unlikely and, if ascertained, would have been quite unusual if not entirely unknown. The story of Muḥammad the orphan seems patterned along other legends of heroes,¹¹⁰ with the difference that his figure was both heroic and hieratic, but is not necessarily untrue on this score alone. So also appears the dating of his birth, generally established by working back from the magical age of 40 as the time of his receipt of God's revelation.¹¹¹

In addition, his given name is in some doubt. He called himself by a variety of names and epithets – Muḥammad, Aḥmad, al-Muqaffī, al-Ḥāshir, Nabī al-Tawba, al-Māḥī. The name Muḥammad occurs only four times in the Qur'ān, in the Medinan period, and Aḥmad occurs only once.

¹⁰⁵ See, for a comprehensive review, Ju'ayt, *Sīra*, 2.144 ff.

¹⁰⁶ Von Bülow, *Wunder*, 26 ff., 110 ff., 127 ff.

¹⁰⁷ 'Qirsh', al-Damirī, *al-Ḥayawān*; *SIH*, 4.172. This denial made its way into what was later to become *ḥadīth*: *US*, § 17; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, 2.266. Al-Ash'ath is an extremely interesting but rather mysterious figure, alternating between furious submission and rebellion, and his career may be emblematic of many unclaritys that bedevil research on the socio-political process of adherence to Muḥammad's movement as illustrated by the Ridda wars. See for instance al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.129, 132, and the material in Sayed, *Revolte*, 76 ff.

¹⁰⁸ *SH*, 4.432; Kister, 'Sons', 70 ff., 77. ¹⁰⁹ *SIH*, 1.99. ¹¹⁰ Ju'ayt, *Sīra*, 2.146.

¹¹¹ Conrad, 'Abraha', 225 ff., 236. The use of the Hijra calendar is of course a complicating factor in any consideration of Muḥammad's date of birth, as in other matters. This is noted by Nagel, *Mohammed*, 99, who opts for March 569.

His given name may have been Qutham (which was rare but by no means bizarre),¹¹² and he was often referred by the patronymic Abū'l-Qāsim.¹¹³ In any case, the name Muḥammad occurs sparingly in North and South Arabian inscriptions as a possible, maybe as a probable, reading of *Mḥmd*,¹¹⁴ and at least seven occurrences of the name among pre-Islamic Arabs are attested in the literary sources.¹¹⁵

Most of these mysteries are in themselves of negligible implication, if we except the question of paternity which would have had consequences for Muḥammad's position within the social structures prevalent before his move to Medina, and perhaps for the intensity of his Qurayshite commitment. Nonetheless, Arabic sources do provide us with much plausible material concerning deeds related to the *modus operandi* of Paleo-Islam, and to the crucial role of Muḥammad as a leader.¹¹⁶

It appears that Muḥammad oversaw twenty-seven military campaigns of varying importance, and was personally engaged in nine.¹¹⁷ Such information is difficult to contest in general, although the chronologies are sometimes uncertain, sometimes conflicting and occasionally out of sequence, with evidence of some telescoping, even at the hands of the most precise of historians.¹¹⁸ But for the purposes of an interpretative history such as this, the matter is not of major consequence.

Military campaigns were of course one means of preserving and expanding the authority of a core constituency built in Medina, ever with an eye to Mecca. We have seen that claims to territorial control in Arabia needed to be staked out and protected in a pattern of variable geographies which,

¹¹² For instance, al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.213.

¹¹³ *SII*, §§ 183, 186; Ju'ayt, *Sira*, 2.147 ff.; Fischer, 'Vergöttlichung', 317 ff.

¹¹⁴ *SH*, 1.118, 120; Robin, 'Graffites islamiques', 188 f., 191. See above, chapter 5 note 183.

¹¹⁵ 'ḥ-m-d', *LA*; Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishtiqāq*, 8 f., and the list in Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, III, 116. See also Wellhausen 'Mohammedanism', 545 n. 1. There is a tendency in scholarship to mystify Muḥammad's name, and it has been postulated that his name may have had eschatological echoes (*TG*, 1.3 n.; see also Goldziher, 'Namen', 157), but this may be unwarranted, despite its occurrence as an attribute in the *mu'allaqa* of Zuhayr (al-Shāyī, *Mu'jam*, 82 f.). For the mystification of this name in Muslim traditions, see al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, 16.75 f.

¹¹⁶ With customary eloquence and precision, Gibbon (*Decline*, 663, 693) described Muḥammad in the following terms: 'He possessed the courage both of thought and action; and, although his designs might gradually expand with his success, the first idea which he entertained of his divine mission bears the stamp of an original and superior genius . . . The operation of force and persuasion, of enthusiasm and fear, continually acted on each other, till every barrier yielded to their irresistible power.' Muḥammad himself declared that with fear he was made victorious (Hammām b. Munabbih, *Ṣaḥīfa*, Arabic text, no. 37).

¹¹⁷ *WAQ*, 7.

¹¹⁸ Jones, 'Chronology'. This is not least so given the difficulty of ascertaining whether months indicated should be reckoned according to the lunar or the luni-solar years (*ibid.*, 280), to which might be added the various Arab calendrical regimes discussed above.

in the case of Muḥammad and his successors, became a durable dynamic of expansion and consolidated control. Two stages emerge after Muḥammad's settlement in Medina. There was first an earlier phase of safeguarding his early implantation in Medina, rapidly followed by a phase of consolidation and aggressive self-assertion. The two operated according to different socio-political arrangements.

We have seen that Muḥammad had initially, during his period of difficulties in Mecca, obtained protection from his immediate paternal lineage; he had also obtained personal protection from al-Muṭ'im b. 'Adī. This arrangement would have been expressed in the terms *ijāra*, *jiwār*, *amān* and *'ahd*, conceptually related and nearly synonymous notions that betoken protection, whereby the stronger party assures the life and property of a person outlawed and therefore vulnerable to open-ended and potentially mortal predation.¹¹⁹ We have already seen that major sections of the Quraysh had declared Muḥammad's life forfeit, and had put this in writing. Protection, an adjunct to liberality and a manifestation of social and, ultimately, military capacity, adds to the symbolic capital of the party offering protection, and plays an important part in the jockeying for honour among the kaleidoscopic vagaries of clan positioning.¹²⁰ It is arguably the case that the Qur'ānic term *ajr*, once the Paleo-Muslims had manoeuvred themselves into a position of strength, had these resonances, ultimately implying protection of individuals and of tribal sections on behalf of God, over and above a sense of salvific recompense which was later to crystallise properly (Q, 26.109, 127, 145, 164, 180).¹²¹

The solicitation of protection was the resort of the weak, considered to be in a temporary condition of *dhimma* and a weak form of *walā'* in relation to the protecting party – weak in that it implied no material (including bodily) tokens of subordination, generally called *zakāt*, to which we shall come later. But once the ostracised party acquired an inner constitution sufficient for protection, it could under favourable circumstances enter into arrangements of an altogether different order, implying parity. And this is what happened to Muḥammad and the Paleo-Muslims in Medina.

In Medina, Muḥammad sought out his uterine relations and was ultimately designated representative, *naqīb*, of the B. al-Najjār,¹²² in a

¹¹⁹ Qaṭāṭ, *al-'Arab*, 223 ff.; Tyan, *Institutions*, 1.60 ff.; 'Amān' and 'Djiwār', *El*. Related to these terms is also *dhimma*, before it acquired the later sense of a regime for non-Muslims: Altheim and Stiehl, *Araber*, 311.

¹²⁰ Farès, *Honneur*, ch. 11, *passim*.

¹²¹ This is of course not the only matter of social arrangements in the Qur'ān where standard Arabian practices are reclaimed: Farès, *Honneur*, 191 f.

¹²² *SIH*, 1.479, 2.119.

situation complicated by a long-standing alliance between Mecca and the Medinan 'Aws, who had previously been ejected from the town by the Khazraj and sought refuge – at the price of alliance – in Mecca.¹²³ Quraysh had also, early on, obtained support from certain Jewish groups against Muḥammad.¹²⁴ Together with other immigrants from Mecca, and quite early according to a socio-political positioning which still requires detailed research, Muḥammad moved from the earlier ritual kinship implied by pacts of protection¹²⁵ into another, following greater self-confidence, transposing ritual kinship from the individual, Muḥammad and other Meccan emigrants, to the collective combining them together. This ritual kinship was modelled upon the pattern of emergent social units, in this case around Muḥammad, the *sayyid* but much more than a *sayyid* and, in determinate ways, beyond social reciprocity. This was expressed in the use in AH 5 of the term *ahl al-bayt* for Muḥammad's immediate entourage of Meccan emigrants.¹²⁶

Conventions of ritual brotherhood (*mu'ākhāt*) were established between individual Meccan immigrants and individual Medinans.¹²⁷ This was ritual brotherhood, not clientage and protection, a preferential treatment whose mechanisms remain obscure. This worked to embed Meccans within various sections of Medina, and the consequent creation of a network of obligations enabling the creation of a distinct group, the *Muhājirūn* or Emigrants. In their collective capacity, these were able to enter with various sections within Medina into a number of treaty arrangements, under written agreements of *ḥilf* (alliance) and *muwāda'a* (concord).

Eight such agreements are recorded in the sources, given the generic title the Constitution of Medina in modern scholarship. The very real possibility of later telescoping and tidying up, and of the transposition and editing of elements contained within these agreements notwithstanding, they do provide indicators of the overall picture.¹²⁸ This is one of a series of agreements made and unmade as they were overtaken and rendered obsolete by political developments,¹²⁹ most particularly the growing strength and extra-Medinan reach of the Paleo-Muslims. Broadly, the Constitution created a coalition of *Muhājirūn* and *Anṣār*, to whom were initially allied various Jewish clans, which were then singly and serially eliminated by military engagements or by the threat of military engagement, once 'hearts

¹²³ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Munammaq*, 271. ¹²⁴ *SIH*, 1.300 ff. ¹²⁵ Wolf, 'Social organization', 341.

¹²⁶ 'Athamina, 'Roots', 9, 27. ¹²⁷ *US*, §§ 101 f.; *SIH*, 2.108 f.

¹²⁸ I am relying overall on Serjeant, '*Sunnah jāmi'ah*', *passim*, with texts, translation, commentary and an attempt at chronology.

¹²⁹ Cf. 'Muḥammad', *EI*, 7.367b.

had changed', and once the new religion 'rescinded older agreements', in the words reportedly directed by 'Ubāda b. al-Ṣāmit to B. Qaynuqā' prior to their devastation.¹³⁰

Political and military developments apart, what the Constitution suggests is an overarching confederation, with boundaries that shifted with time, according to norms common in Arabia. A confederation such as this stipulates that no party allied to the *Muhājirūn*–*Anṣār* core – in this instance, largely the Jewish clans – would aid or abet a third party against a party to the agreement, nor would they offer protection to an enemy of any party to the agreement.¹³¹ Correlatively, in the crucial Arabian matter of blood-wit, these would be settled among each party to the confederation, the *Muhājirūn* and the various sections of the *Anṣār* separately and autonomously, according to their own customs, provided that no liability is admitted of a *Mu'min* to a *kāfir*, unless this latter be party to this agreement.¹³² Financial obligations to cover military expenses were incumbent upon all who were involved militarily, including Jewish clans.¹³³

Finally, and crucially for later developments, any disagreement was to be referred to the arbitration of Allāh and His Apostle.¹³⁴ As it stands, this series of agreements would have yielded an unstable arrangement, and might have atrophied had it not figured in the relatively short fullness of time as a point of accumulation – the accumulation of social, political and military force which acted as a vector giving it sustenance and an expanding remit, animated by the growing primacy of Muḥammad and the ritual elaboration of his confederation that will be discussed below. Indeed, the emergent arrangement centred around the energy generated by Muḥammad's charisma.

This nascent polity was inherently unstable, in this region and time of considerable volatility, liable to implosion and to centrifugal torsions once the charismatic core, and the remit of rapid expansion, that held it together weakened, relented or disappeared. For the duration of Muḥammad's Medinan activity – and we understand little about the political nature of his activities prior to his acquisition of a base from which he was able to project his talents – his very high voltage charisma was continually fortified and reinforced by success. What he deployed was a canny military strategy, an unflinching alertness and agility and capacity for innovation and for the motivation of others, political and diplomatic talent at once purposeful

¹³⁰ WAQ, 179. ¹³¹ WAQ, 176.

¹³² *SIH*, 2.106; Serjeant, '*Sunnah jāmi'ah*', 15, 23 f. It is unlikely that this term, important for the later development of Islam, had a concrete doctrinal content in this context.

¹³³ *SIH*, 2.107. ¹³⁴ *SIH*, 2.107; Serjeant, '*Sunnah jāmi'ah*', 24.

and flexible, clement and ruthless, a sense of timing for the calibration of moves and moments almost uncanny in their precision, and strategic vision in terms of western and northern Arabia with Mecca at its ultimate centre.

The centrifugal unravelling of the Medinan system of alliances is precisely what happened once Muḥammad was dead, with a regenerative pull of earlier directions and balances of force, the surfacing of the conflicts kept underground by his authority, and the results of imbalances and disturbances in the status quo ante generated by Muḥammad's movement. The significant difference between conditions at the time of Muḥammad's death and the status quo ante was that, by the time the so-called Apostasy Wars broke out (632–633), the Meccan aristocracy had become part of the emergent system, and was to lead it for a century, taking it along as they founded the empire of the Umayyads. In this transition, the primary role can be attributed to the energetic determination of Muḥammad's first successor, Abū Bakr, whose extraordinary effectiveness does not sit well with the cliché of aged placidity, somewhat wizened by piety, that appears in the sources and overshadows his image.

The instability of the Muḥammadan movement's alliances was not so much structural as congenital, in the sense that such systems of alliance across the Arabian Peninsula were always unstable, highly vulnerable to vagaries of the environment and of the surrounding political structures. Such instability was an integral part of the Arabs' horizon of expectations, except in those regions which were within the reach of durable centres of imperial, royal or quasi-royal power; they were precarious even there. The lack, at the inception of the Muḥammadan movement, of a durable centre emitting royalist energy that had customarily acted as a stabilising vector for alliances, was remedied expeditiously. The Muḥammadan movement started rapidly to acquire some of the characteristics and prerogatives associated with such centres, and to attach them to Muḥammad's tactical and political adroitness, his formidable personality and his vatic gifts.

Charismatic authority amplified

The judgements of later historians notwithstanding, there were practical translations of the Qur'ānic injunctions (Q, 24.47, 51, 52, 54 and *passim*) and treaty agreements relating to the necessity of obedience to God and Muḥammad, and indeed to the notion that submission to Muḥammad was simultaneously submission to God (Q, 4.80). In the crucial matter of blood-wit, it is reported that in AH 2 Muḥammad had the various relevant

agreements and prerogatives relating to his associated lineages (*ma'āqil* documents) attached to the hilt of his sword¹³⁵ – one would assume that these were chits which might earlier have been attached to sacred sites for confirmation and guarantee, now transferred to Muḥammad's person. The right to vengeance was in this way to some degree restricted, despite the provisions of the Constitution of Medina, and inapplicable among the parties to Muḥammad's polity, with the Apostle taking on the role of the ultimate arbiter and enabler. This was clearly a step towards transferring the right to talion from clan to a higher instance, and in the fullness of time to the state, under whose auspices it became a form of legal penalty, not sheer blood-wit, with the latter incorporated into the body of formal legislation.¹³⁶ Seeking monopoly of legitimate physical force, or at least control over its deployment, is a classic marker of an emergent state-like rationalising polity.

Like pagan deities, therefore, Muḥammad became the ultimate guarantor of agreements, like great Arab lords (including kings) before him. He was often patterned after the likeness of biblical prophets and especially prophet/kings like Solomon and David, as they occur in the Qur'ān.¹³⁷ One would agree that what we have is an emergent polity that is God's, personified by His Apostle. Muḥammad had other, chiefly and proto-royal privileges as well,¹³⁸ without necessitating the assumption that the civil polity of Medina grew out of the religious.¹³⁹ Clearly, prophecy and quasi-royalty were in the case of Muḥammad continuous, each for its part using the resources of the other for greater consolidation; his was a case of an emergent 'priestly-prophetic kingship'.¹⁴⁰ It was not for nothing that contemporary poetry often referred to him as al-Dayyān (a term also used for Allāh), conveying the sense of both indivisible rule and lawgiving, and of the ultimate point of appeal and of obedience.¹⁴¹ Muḥammad at Medina, it has been maintained suggestively, lay somewhere between the models of an Italian podestà and Calvin at Geneva,¹⁴² and in the Medinan moment we have the politico-anthropological setting for later political theology.

Muḥammad's position and his undivided and indivisible authority were emblematised concretely in a number of privileges, signalling not only a

¹³⁵ TAB, 385. The term as used here does not mean 'geographical settlements', as in Wellhausen, 'Constitution', 129.

¹³⁶ Cf. Wellhausen, 'Constitution', 132.

¹³⁷ Busse, 'Herschertypen', 58, 61, but without the extent of Solomon's mastery over the elements and over things seen and unseen (on which *ibid.*, 62 f.).

¹³⁸ Wellhausen, 'Constitution', 7 f.

¹³⁹ Wellhausen, 'Mohammedanism', 553.

¹⁴⁰ Stetkevych, *Golden Bough*, 112.

¹⁴¹ Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 93 f.

¹⁴² Weber, *Sociology*, 51.

very distinctive status, but one that was, in the way of kingship, incommensurable, and beyond relations of reciprocity. One related to privileged access to women,¹⁴³ like other Arab chiefs, a matter that dramatised his supremacy vividly. Muḥammad had first choice of women captured as booty during military campaigns, and of course the privilege of maintaining simultaneously more wives than God had permitted in the Qur'ān. His marriage to Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, the erstwhile wife of his adoptive son Zayd b. Ḥāritha, is a staple of these discussions. This case involved divine sanction both for repudiating the adoptive paternity of Zayd, and the abolition of adoption overall, with inheritance henceforth confined to blood descendants and other relations (Q, 33.6). It also gave Muḥammad leave to marry his paternal cross-cousin Zaynab (Q, 33.50), a form of marriage uncommon among the Quraysh, who preferred to avoid marriage between first-degree cousins.¹⁴⁴ Other matters exceeded the expectations of even his closest allies. Muḥammad dismissed peremptorily Abū Bakr's protest that the former may not marry the latter's daughter 'Ā'isha, as the two associates had also declared themselves to be brothers, maintaining that their brotherhood was confined to brotherhood in the religion of Allāh.

There must clearly be a connection between cross-cousin marriage, the campaign against *di'wa* (the genealogical adoption of a misbegotten child, reflected in the Qur'ān),¹⁴⁵ the principle that paternity is decided in the marriage bed only (*al-walad li'l-frāsh*) and the related campaign against false genealogical claims.¹⁴⁶ And clearly, there must be a connection between

¹⁴³ A nineteenth-century Protestant polemical tract, appended to the Arabic translation of George Sales' 'Preliminary discourse' to his 1734 English translation of the Qur'ān, gives a very clear, detailed and precise tally of divine intervention (as Qur'ānic revelations) in Muḥammad's matrimonial life: al-'Arabī, 'Tadhyl', 364 ff.

¹⁴⁴ Ju'ayt, *Sīra*, 2.63 ff. See Dostal, 'Mecca', 202 ff., 205 ff., who estimates 57.95 per cent of Qurayshi marriages to have been exogamous, and who describes these matrimonial patterns as multi-generational, extended patrilineal marriages, and to have been predominantly monogamous. Matrimonial practices of the time, conjugating a unilinear ideology and cognatic alliances, are well described by Conte, 'Alliance et parenté', 121 ff. Watt (*Muhammad at Medina*, 277 f., 284, 287 f.) discusses one aspect of Muḥammad's marriages that seem to have been in accordance with arguably matrilineal customs, especially those involving women offering themselves to him, which did not detract from the virilocal arrangements obtaining.

¹⁴⁵ Rubin, 'Al-walad', *passim*. Not unnaturally, though this was to be reflected in Muslim law, this campaign was not uniformly effective in the years following Muḥammad, as an example of which the author (at 14 f.) cites the famous case of Ziyād b. Abī Sufyān/Ziyād b. Abih. In all, it must be stated that all comment on marriage among pre-imperial Arabs must remain provisional until the relevant material is fully studied from an anthropological perspective rather than starting from formal legal arrangements as described and derided by later Muslim sources. The primary material is plentiful, and indicated a loose arrangement regarding adoption, paternity, and the availability and circulation of women, among the very best of families. Much material is most conveniently listed in Ibn al-Kalbī, *Mathālib*, 38 ff.

¹⁴⁶ Landau-Tasseron, 'Adoption', who indicates (177 f.) that, again, this did not prevail entirely.

Muḥammadan/Qur'ānic legislation of marriage, and the correlative abolition of other forms of marriage prevailing, including simultaneous marriages of a man to sisters, marriage to a deceased father's widow, and the solicitation by a fecund woman (*istibdā'*)¹⁴⁷ – and, correlatively, of a woman indicating that she is divorced unilaterally by shifting the location of the door to her dwelling.¹⁴⁸ One would need to bring into the same context the salience of *qasāma*, the form of oath commonly used to establish paternity and liability in cases of murder, among others.¹⁴⁹ In all, the Apostle acted as a legislator, not a mediator, all part of constructing points of accumulation related to a legislative habitus in the ambit of a growing polity.

Muḥammad's authority was thus expressed in non-habitual ways and had a non-habitual amplitude. It extended to sacred time and sacred space, but also to social relations with respect to whose ordinary conduct he was immune to reciprocity; and he did accumulate tokens of this transcendence with respect to prevalent norms. In AH 2, he sent a sortie commanded by 'Abd Allāh b. Jaḥsh with secret instructions to raid during a sacred month¹⁵⁰ – a violation which in his own youth had precipitated the famous four-year war between Quraysh and Qays 'Aylān known as Ḥarb al-Fijār.¹⁵¹ This was not a unique instance,¹⁵² and it clearly indicates that Muḥammad was announcing that he no longer recognised the holy months of the Ḥums. Even more, the raid took place on the last day of the month of Rajab, which was a holy month to all, irrespective of adherence to a particular cultic association, thereby signalling an emergent cultic association that did not hold itself bound to the prevalent notion of inviolate, crucial months which were again to be recognised after Muḥammad had taken Mecca, but according to a new calendar.¹⁵³ Later, sanctity of refuge at the Meccan sanctum itself was suspended as Mecca was finally being assaulted, and some of those taking refuge were given no quarter, on Muḥammad's orders.¹⁵⁴ The Prophet declared that protection of this ultimate *ḥaram* had been withdrawn by God for him alone, for that occasion only, and that it would never be withdrawn again.¹⁵⁵

Muḥammad's command authority extended to the distribution of economic resources at his discretion, in a manner that varied with

¹⁴⁷ See 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 5.336 ff., and Qaṭāṭ, *al-'Arab*, 17 ff.

¹⁴⁸ *AGH*, 7.275. On divorce, see 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 5.548 ff.

¹⁴⁹ Peters, 'Murder', 140. See 137 ff., 162 ff., for an argument against Jewish 'origins' of this oath.

¹⁵⁰ *SIH*, 2.178, with different details according to a different tradition in *TAB*, 261 ff.

¹⁵¹ *SIH*, 1.168 ff.; much more detail in *AGH*, 22.40 ff.

¹⁵² See the chronological computations of Sprenger, 'Kalender', 157.

¹⁵³ *US*, §§ 111 f.; *WAQ*, 18, and see Sprenger, 'Kalender', 157 f.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Pèlerinage*, 4. ¹⁵⁵ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2:60.

circumstances. Contrary to his conduct after the Battle of Badr or after the campaign against Banū Qurayza, which had been in keeping with the common usage of the Arab redistributive war economy, Muḥammad did not allocate to himself only one fifth of the booty which counted as Allāh's allocation.¹⁵⁶ Following the expulsion of Banū al-Naḍir in AH 4, Muḥammad declared, supported by a Qur'ānic revelation, that the entirety of spoils (including land) would be his.¹⁵⁷ He granted some land to al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām; markets and land were also granted to ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb.¹⁵⁸ Similar land grants were made to others, including members of Muḥammad's own family, there and elsewhere (especially at Khaybar, when the *ṭuʿam* were duly registered in writing, a fifth allocated to Allāh and distributed in kind and to orphans, the rest sold).¹⁵⁹ This practice continued after him, first by ʿUmar in Arabia, and of course elsewhere during the Arab conquests.¹⁶⁰ In the Arab patrimonial way, Muḥammad distributed wealth with largesse, including gold¹⁶¹ and gold mining franchises (against a 20 per cent levy to his treasury).¹⁶²

This patrimonial distribution of new wealth was clearly dictated by the desiderata of consolidating the core constituency. Lands at Khaybar were distributed to persons who had fought at al-Ḥudaybiyya, both to those who had gone on to fight at Khaybar and to others who had not.¹⁶³ But it was also dictated by the need to widen the range of alliances, including the tactical offer of blandishments to shifty commanders, a matter well illustrated by the case of ʿUyayna b. Ḥiṣn al-Fazārī.¹⁶⁴ Most

¹⁵⁶ An allocation of a fourth or a fifth of the booty was customary, as we have seen. This allocation is also concordant with Roman and provincial Roman practices (*occupatio*), and it would not be far-fetched to maintain that the Arabian practice may have been part of a late Roman legal koine or an archaic, independent version thereof: Schacht, 'Droit byzantin', 205; Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, 93.

¹⁵⁷ WAQ, 522 f., 777 f.; Q, 59.7. Note that resentments may well have ensued; Bell (*Commentary*, 1.96) interprets Q, 3.155 as a repudiation of charges that Muḥammad had somehow misappropriated a cloak from the spoils of Badr.

¹⁵⁸ See overall Lecker, 'Markets'. Granting land was a practice to be continued by Muḥammad's successors, generating enormous wealth, now all the more plentiful as the conquests were in progress. See, for instance, Lecker, 'Estates'. For the proliferation of wealth in Medina in Paleo-Muslim times, Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, 1022 ff., and Nagel, *Mohammed*, 574 f.

¹⁵⁹ WAQ, 680 ff., 694 f. ¹⁶⁰ US, §§ 162, 247, 512, 514.

¹⁶¹ 'awāq': Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 6.10, 16, 231.

¹⁶² Heck, 'Gold mining', 372. For the finance of Muḥammad's polity overall, see Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 250 ff., and Ibrahim, *Herausbildungsprozess*, § 1.3, although it should be clear that there was no public treasury as such at the time, and that booty, the predominant source of revenue, was distributed immediately, along with other income: Puin, *Dīwān*, 65, 66 n. 1.

¹⁶³ WAQ, 683 ff.; *SIH*, 3.231 f., 236 ff.; TAB, 444 ff., 706.

¹⁶⁴ 'Uyayna and his men fought on Muḥammad's side at the Battle of the Ditch against one third of Medina's date harvest, an agreement later annulled by the Apostle. 'Uyayna later agreed to aid the Jews of Khaybar against the Paleo-Muslim assault against one half of their date harvest,

contentious at the time was the affair of those with ‘their hearts associated’, *al-mu’allaḥa qulūbuhum* – and these included ‘Uyayna b. Ḥiṣn, later to repudiate his Paleo-Muslim allegiance at the death of Muḥammad and to join the Ridda.¹⁶⁵ Following the defeat and expropriation of Hawāzin at Ḥunayn (in 8/630), Muḥammad’s last significant declared enemies, the spoils of battle were distributed to a wide group of people, including Quraysh, but to the exclusion of the Medinan Anṣār.¹⁶⁶ This preferential treatment of very late converts and persons of dubious loyalty, whom the Apostle wished to acquire a vested interest in his polity, incurred the reproach of even Ḥassān b. Thābit, Muḥammad’s panegyrist,¹⁶⁷ and amounted to a disturbance in the pecking order that had existed in Medina hitherto.¹⁶⁸

These practical claims for command prerogatives and for the capacity to override customary expectations and negotiations amounted to the intensification of authority acting through the capillaries of society. They were further amplified by displays of elementary quasi-royalist emblems commensurate with the material culture of the Ḥijāz at the time. The ancient emblem of authority and command, the canopy of red hide (*qubba*), was frequently erected for Muḥammad during his campaigns, including one at a visible height above Mecca as his followers were about to take it over; others were erected for wives accompanying him.¹⁶⁹ Like earlier commanders, soothsayers and poets, he held forth supporting himself on a short staff or spear, the ‘*anaza*, which seems to have doubled up as marking the centre of his private enclosure in Medina.¹⁷⁰ This object and others, such as his cloak, were,¹⁷¹ during Muḥammad’s lifetime and thereafter, sought after by

but switched sides when promised the same by Muḥammad, who ultimately granted him only a region of Khaybar called Dhū’l Ruqayba. He was then appointed tribute collector among the Fazāra: WAQ, 477 ff., 650 ff., 803 f. This system of offering blandishments to commanders was to continue throughout the Arab conquests, as well illustrated by Donner, *Conquests*, 255 ff.

¹⁶⁵ See the discussion of Kister, ‘Mecca and the tribes’, 40 f.

¹⁶⁶ WAQ, 942 ff.; Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 6.10, 16 (for the grant of spoils to Abū Sufyān, Yazīd b. Abī Sufyān and his brother Mu’āwiya); SIH, 4.98 ff.; TAB, 468 ff.; AGH, 14.195 ff. On divisions among the anti-Muḥammadan Quraysh, and their consequences for Muḥammad’s ultimate success, see Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 55 ff., 64 – it might be noted that, shortly before the conquest of Mecca, perceiving a situation of want in the city, Muḥammad sent money to Abū Sufyān for distribution: Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 6.7.

¹⁶⁷ Ḥassān b. Thābit, *Diwān*, no. 31; SIH, 4.105.

¹⁶⁸ On the various classes of Paleo-Muslims in Medina, and conflicts between them, see Muranyi, *Prophetengenossen*, ch. 3, and Noth, ‘Früher Islam’, 38, 53. On the Muḥammadan elite in Medina, see Donner, *Conquests*, 75 ff.

¹⁶⁹ WAQ, 109, 407, 454; SIH, 4.37, 94.

¹⁷⁰ On Muḥammad’s ‘*anaza*, US, § 130; Miles, ‘Mihrāb and ‘Anazah’, 165 ff.

¹⁷¹ On the cloak, reputedly granted by the Prophet to Ka’b b. Zuhayr following his repudiation of a lampoon he had composed against Muḥammad, and later sold to Mu’āwiya for a very considerable sum, later serving as part of the ceremonial dress of Caliphs: Ibn Qutayba, *Shi’r*, 1:142.

many and sometimes given away by him, as marks of the delegation, and possibly as amulets. This sympathetic transference of charisma had had a long history among royal and imperial systems in the region (as elsewhere), and was to be continued by the Caliphate in the form of robes of honour (*khila'*, sg. *khil'a*).¹⁷² Among other things, Mu'āwīya stipulated that he be buried wearing a mantle given him by the Prophet, and that the finger-nails of Muḥammad he had gathered as the Prophet groomed himself be pulped and placed into his mouth and upon his eyes.¹⁷³ A lock of the Apostle's hair in the possession of Khālid b. al-Walid was said to have ensured his spectacular military victories.¹⁷⁴

In addition, and in the manner expected of a commander, Muḥammad prescribed battle-cries for the various troops of his followers. He conferred banners, emblems of delegated authority and battle standards, some signifying military command (sg. *liwā*), others kinship groups (sg. *rāya*), only infrequently Islamised, like the battle-cries. In the process, he declared that obedience to his commanders constituted obedience to him, just as obedience to him was obedience to God.¹⁷⁵ Such standards and battle-cries were in evidence after his death at the Battle of Ṣiffīn.¹⁷⁶ Muḥammad's standards are reported variously to have been black or white, one of the former called the Eagle (*al-ʿuqāb*),¹⁷⁷ suggesting an image, or otherwise yellow. Later sources attribute to Muḥammad a seal inscribed *Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh*, which is not implausible.¹⁷⁸

Power was also projected by a subdued speech protocol in Muḥammad's presence (Q, 49.2 f.), by using Bilāl not only as a caller to prayer but as a public crier,¹⁷⁹ and of course by the erection of a low platform, *minbar*, from which he received embassies from Arabia. This was structure with a regalian function which became rapidly elaborated over the Paleo-Islamic period, well into Umayyad times when it became a symbol of royalty,¹⁸⁰

¹⁷² Springberg-Hinsen, *Khil'a*, 43 ff., 48 ff., 55 ff.

¹⁷³ TAB, 1002. See Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 72 ff., and Nagel, *Mohammed*, 680 ff.

¹⁷⁴ Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 5.34. ¹⁷⁵ Hammām b. Munabbih, *Ṣaḥīfā*, Arabic text, no. 21.

¹⁷⁶ Hinds, 'Banners', 8. The banners of Tayy, of the Ashā'ira and, indistinctly, of Ḥaḍrawawt are reported to have had a moon crescent: *ibid.*, figs. 18, 26, 33. See also Marsham, *Rituals*, 64.

¹⁷⁷ For instance, *US*, no. 125; *WAQ*, 8, 71, 649, 996, 1002 f.; *SIH*, 2.174, 186; TAB, 359 f.; Hinds, 'Banners', 11. The standard called al-ʿUqāb is reported to have been Quṣayy's, and to have been carried by Umayyad commanders in pre-Muḥammadan Mecca and, later, hoisted by Khālid b. al-Walid at the conquest of Damascus: *AGH*, 22.43; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.134. On standards in this context, Marsham, *Rituals*, 65.

¹⁷⁸ TAB, 771. ¹⁷⁹ *WAQ*, 645.

¹⁸⁰ Muḥammad's *minbar* was reputedly crafted by Tamīm al-Dārī after Syrian models (Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1.215). See Horowitz, 'Biographies' (1927), 257 ff.; Becker, *Islamstudien*, 1.342 f. and *passim*; Miles, 'Mīhrāb and 'Anazah', 162, 163 n. 16.

having been used first by ‘Uthmān after a period of abeyance,¹⁸¹ during which it may have symbolised the iconic presence of the absent Prophet. As might be expected of a great lord, Muḥammad often appeared in fine garments imported from Syria, Yemen and Persia.¹⁸² Finally, throughout the Medinan period, he received the *bay‘a* formally, including that of the principal leader of the Qurayshi coalition against him, Abū Sufyān.¹⁸³ These regalian institutes were fairly simple nevertheless, with much informality,¹⁸⁴ but decorum was of the essence.

Consolidation and scalar extension

As has been indicated, Muḥammad accumulated authority as he accumulated alliances, many of them in the customary way; many of his military campaigns aimed more to neutralise a variety of clans than to achieve territorial dominion. Many lineages joined his movement by way of marriage, alliance and protection.¹⁸⁵ Matrimonial alliances were important; among others, and towards the very end of his life, after having been contemptuously rejected as a possible husband by the Naṣrid princess Asmā’ bint al-Nu‘mān, Muḥammad married Qatīla, the sister of al-Ash‘ath b. Qays al-Kindī, a Kindite ‘King’ who, as we have seen, had himself claimed Muḥammad’s kingship, but she is said, without certainty, to have died before she had reached him.¹⁸⁶ The Apostle had previously married Tumādir bint al-Aṣḥagh b. ‘Amr, thereby becoming the first Qurayshi ever to marry a Kalbī,¹⁸⁷ making allies on his northern borders and initiating a series of matrimonial and other alliances that were to be of considerable importance during Umayyad times. Moreover, the case of Ṣafiyya bint Ḥuyayy b. Akḥṭab at Khaybar is not the only instance during which Muḥammad manumitted a captive woman he had married, in this case a converted Jew.¹⁸⁸

It is difficult to discern what adherence to Muḥammad’s new religion implied at the time, apart from being party to his alliances. There are many indications of forced ‘conversions’ on pain of death.¹⁸⁹ These included the

¹⁸¹ Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.162 f. ¹⁸² For instance, WAQ, 1011, 1090, and *passim*.

¹⁸³ *US*, § 273; WAQ, 603; *SIH*, 2.79; 3.196 ff., 202 ff.; TAB, 55.

¹⁸⁴ Cook, ‘Prophet Muḥammad’, 23 ff., 26 ff., highlighting patterns of access to him, though the author seems to hint that later sources that detailed these matters contrived an image of simplicity contrasting with conditions in their own time.

¹⁸⁵ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Munammaq*, 301 ff.

¹⁸⁶ *SH*, 3.454. Ibn Sa‘d (*Ṭabaqāt*, 10.139 ff.), quoting ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr, claims that Qatīla later joined her brother during the Ridda.

¹⁸⁷ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 298. ¹⁸⁸ TAB, 496. ¹⁸⁹ For instance, WAQ, 641.

case of Abū Sufyān in the presence of Muḥammad, having been taken prisoner on the eve of the conquest of Mecca.¹⁹⁰ Muḥammad's triumphs, especially from 7/628–9, threw terror into the hearts of his adversaries.¹⁹¹ Al-'Abbās had converted late to Muḥammad's faith, having previously been taken prisoner at Badr while fighting against the Apostle. Also late were the conversions of Qurayshi grandees, most notably Khālīd b. al-Walīd, one of the greatest military assets of the new faith, who had earlier led the only militarily successful Qurayshi campaign against Muḥammad, and 'Amr b. al-Āṣ, who was to have a glittering and extremely prosperous career in the emergent state, and who had previously travelled to Medina to offer allegiance to the Prophet.¹⁹²

But clearly, there was an increasing tendency to confine participation in military campaigns to 'converts', and to exclude all but these from public meeting places which later became Muslim places of worship.¹⁹³ Muḥammad had been stalking the Meccans for years, with a feline elegance that reinforced his diplomatic and political parleying with them.¹⁹⁴ One effect of these military activities was the disruption of supplies of food to Mecca, with a resulting famine in AH 6 or 8 (627 or 629), which may very well have been deliberately planned,¹⁹⁵ although Muḥammad the diplomat, wielding both carrot and stick in the same hand, seems also to have intervened with the recently converted Thumāma b. Uthal, for a while the master of al-Yamāma, to resume grain supplies to Mecca at a moment of famine.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁰ *SIH*, 4.33.

¹⁹¹ WAQ, 907, reports some, fleeing after Ḥunayn, as saying that they were overcome by such trembling that God 'projected Islam' into our hearts.

¹⁹² WAQ, 741 ff., 746 ff., 818 ff. Khālīd was notoriously fractious, buccaneering and violent, but his tendency excessively to pursue the logic of vengeance and plunder irrespective of the Prophet's instructions and injunctions did not diminish Muḥammad's appreciation of his talents, to the extent of dubbing him the 'God's sword': WAQ, 880 ff., 883.

¹⁹³ For instance, WAQ, 47; *SIH*, 2.125 ff.

¹⁹⁴ See the excellent description by Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 408 ff., 415. It is noteworthy that, beyond indicating a consistent interest in the north, and possibly in reaction to power vacuums which may have led him to press his advantage along routes used by Meccan traders, some of Muḥammad's campaigns – against Mu'ta, for instance, or Dūmat al-Jandal – are difficult to interpret. See Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 53; Donner, *Muhammad*, 47, 50; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 447.

¹⁹⁵ Donner, 'Food supplies', 155 f., 158 ff., 261, 264 and *passim*.

¹⁹⁶ Kister, 'Struggle', 10, but the identity of the interlocutor at al-Yamāma remains uncertain. On the lords of the region during this period, see Makin, *Representing the Enemy*, 128 ff., who also (at 133 ff.) discusses Musaylima's companions and allies. It is notable that the relations between Quraysh and B. Ḥanīfa pre-dated the migration of the latter from the Ḥijāz to central Arabia after the war of al-Basūs in the sixth century: see Makin, *Representing the Enemy*, 127 and 127 n. 5.

War with the Meccans gave way to negotiations following the growth of Muḥammad's authority, particularly after the Treaty of al-Ḥudaybiyya into which Muḥammad entered from a precarious position.¹⁹⁷ Each of the covenanting parties undertook to return to the other side any person who had sought to emigrate in either direction, having previously been allied to the other party, and this included adherents of Muḥammad's religion trying to join him, until, with divine sanction, Muḥammad saw fit to repudiate this policy.¹⁹⁸

Finally, with the capture of Mecca, Muḥammad declared an amnesty and protection for whoever entered territory under his own control, whoever 'entered the house of Abū Sufyān' and whoever chose to shut himself up in his own house and go about his own business, clearly indicating the suspension, for the time being, of any requirement of conversion.¹⁹⁹ By this time, Muḥammad's military had evolved from raiding parties and private armies to tribal contingents led by members of the Medinan elite.²⁰⁰ His enhanced military capacity was in evidence with the use of siege engines at al-Ṭā'if, apparently without a full mastery of this technology.²⁰¹

Following this came what Arabic sources call the Year of the Delegations, *ʿām al-wufūd*, usually specified as 8/629–30, during which the Apostle received, in Medina, delegations from various parts of Arabia, with representatives of various groups pledging him allegiance.²⁰² Like previous pledges of allegiance to a variety of Arab groups, but more concertedly, these were accompanied by pledges from Muḥammad (*ʿahd*) of protection and for the safety of lives, goods and properties, in return for political allegiance and the payment of a variety of levies on livestock and produce, sometimes specified in great detail, and of course for adopting Paleo-Muslim cultic observances, as they developed, and the repudiation of pagan worship.²⁰³

¹⁹⁷ See WAQ, 610 ff., for the received text.

¹⁹⁸ *US*, § 226, 231. The question of intermarriage came up at this stage, including the case of Abū'l 'Āṣ b. al-Rabī' who had married Muḥammad's daughter Zaynab while persisting in his paganism – a story that involved the separation of the spouses, the protection of the captured Abū'l 'Āṣ at the request of his wife, and finally the conversion of the dour husband: *SIH*, 2.213 ff., 3.209 f.; *TAB*, 379 f.

¹⁹⁹ *US*, § 273; *SIH*, 4.33; *TAB*, 55 f. ²⁰⁰ Donner, 'Military institutions', 315 f.

²⁰¹ WAQ, 927; Jandora, *March*, 39.

²⁰² See especially Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, 499 ff. The historicity of this assembly of accounts on these delegations is much debated, and on occasion interpreted in terms of later genealogies. The scholarship is well reviewed by Makin, *Representing the Enemy*, 103 ff.

²⁰³ For instance, WAQ, 1028 ff., 1084 f., and *SIH*, 4.179 f. For these documents, see Marsham, *Rituals*, 63 f. For legal aspects of these promissory agreements, see Pedersen, *Eid*, 188 ff. It should be emphasised that there was no specific template that was handed out in several copies, but that different arrangements were made according to circumstances. Yuhanna b. Ru'ba, master of Ayla, was brought into the presence of the Prophet. He was granted a Yemenite cloak, and given a

In the case of the powerful Thaqīf, whose delegation was provided with a *qubba*,²⁰⁴ Muḥammad's document confirmed the inviolate nature of their domains,²⁰⁵ earlier inviolate under the protection of Allāt.

Clearly, Muḥammad's alliances were understood by most contemporaries to have been binding upon them in the customary way and in the light of experience, without necessary implications of long-term durability. In terms of this understanding, payment of dues such as *ṣadaqa* and *zakāt* were regarded as tributes consequent upon submission, rendered all the more disadvantageous by the takeover by Muḥammad's commonwealth of grazing grounds (*ḥimā*) that belonged to others, and of proportions of levies on produce that had earlier been exacted by other parties.²⁰⁶

There is not much sense in trying to specify technical distinctions between *ṣadaqa* and *zakāt* (later, technically, charity, with different nuances and forms), *jizya* (later, technically, capitation tax), or between those and *kharāj* (later, technically, land tax), at that time or in the period immediately following Muḥammad. As far as an Arab polity like that of Muḥammad and his immediate successors was concerned, and as perceived by groups pledging allegiance, all were different forms of tribute. Later, in Iraq, *kharāj* and *jizya* were only properly distinguished in the eighth century. The system merged well with the Arab tribal definition of *jizya* as collective tribute following collective submission,²⁰⁷ extracted from all except those who adhered to the ruling instance as warriors, irrespective of conversion.²⁰⁸

The lack of clear technical distinctions between terms used to betoken forms of allegiance to the Paleo-Muslim order should not be taken to indicate that there was no emergent coherence in the Paleo-Muslim package by means of which dominion functioned and was expressed. During the wars of the Ridda almost immediately following Muḥammad's death, Abū Bakr declared that he was determined to vanquish whoever tried to distinguish between prayer, *ṣalāt*, and the *zakāt*, the spiritual and the material correlates of allegiance to the Muḥammadan polity.²⁰⁹ Territorial control and

document assuring him of protection and demanding *jizya* capitation tax. The document also took up the important matter of security of shipping out of Ayla: WAQ, 1932. On the importance of this emporium in Late Antiquity, Ghawanmeh, 'Aqaba'.

²⁰⁴ *SIH*, 4.137. ²⁰⁵ *US*, § 459. ²⁰⁶ 'Ridda', *EL*; Lecker, 'Kinda', 338 f.

²⁰⁷ Morony, *Iraq*, 108 f., and cf. more generally 'Alī, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 5.306.

²⁰⁸ Morony, *Iraq*, 110. It does not appear particularly helpful to pursue a lexicographical study of the term *zakāt* in terms of comparative Semitic languages, and there seems to be little reason to assert that this was extracted by the Apostle in return for the performance of prayer (as in Bashear, 'Origins', 93 ff.), although one might well agree that the term did also relate to sacrifice by substitution (Chelhod, *Sacrifice*, 127 ff.).

²⁰⁹ Al-Kilā'i, *Ridda*, 2. Bashear ('Origins', 108 f.) brings in material regarding the perception, during the Ridda, of *zakāt* as tribute, *itāwa*.

the exaction of various forms of tribute were standard criteria of dominion in the Arabian Peninsula, and had been practised by the Jewish lineages of Medina against weaker lineages not long before Muḥammad.²¹⁰ Together with ritual, these constituted formative elements in one indivisible package, both vectors carrying Paleo-Islam to greater cumulative coherence. Somewhat later, under ‘Umar I, the Jafnid Jabala b. al-Ayham, understanding well the ways of the Arabs and capable of at least some resistance, contested the demand of Yazīd b. Abī Sufyān (then in charge of Syria) to pay *jizya*. This, he considered, was incumbent upon *‘ulūj* only, and inapplicable to Arabs,²¹¹ not least, one might add, noble Arabs.

Prophecy and territorial control

Not uncharacteristically, therefore, what was later spiritualised as Wars of Apostasy (*Ridda*)²¹² did not start as the wholesale termination of a continuing alliance, given that the man to whom personal allegiance had been declared was now dead.²¹³ The Ridda wars were engagements between parallel confederations of which the Medinan was only one.²¹⁴ For all his dramatically growing power, Muḥammad had not succeeded in unifying Arabia.²¹⁵ This war was in effect half a dozen separate movements,²¹⁶ and had been waged, perhaps in the majority of cases, against groups that had hitherto remained largely or entirely independent of Muḥammad’s polity.²¹⁷ It was an aggressive war of expansion and consolidation rather than chiefly of retrieval and, in sum, the completion of a dynamic started under Muḥammad, later extended further, initially into the steppes of Syria and Iraq, triggering the great wave of Arab conquests.²¹⁸

Obedience to the Apostle was valid during his lifetime, not afterwards and, according to the poet al-Khaṭīl b. Aws, it would be vexing to have to obey Abū Bakr and Bakr his son after him.²¹⁹ What this implied was that though various parties that had pledged allegiance to Muḥammad would not revert to paganism, and would continue to

²¹⁰ ‘Athamina, ‘Tribal kings’, 33 ff. ²¹¹ Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.142.

²¹² This narrative sublimation of these wars was already noted in the mid-1920s by ‘Abd al-Rāziq, *al-Islām*, 196 ff.

²¹³ Cf. the comments on personal allegiance to the Apostle and their implications for the Ridda by Marsham, *Rituals*, 61.

²¹⁴ Ibrahim, *Herausbildungsprozess*, §§ 1.2.2, 1.5.1.

²¹⁵ On the extent of Muḥammad’s control, see Shoufani, *Riddah*, ch. 1.

²¹⁶ Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 148 f. ²¹⁷ Noth, ‘Früher Islam’, 28.

²¹⁸ Donner, *Conquests*, 89.

²¹⁹ Al-Kilā‘ī, *Ridda*, 3. A very similar poem is attributed to al-Ḥuṭay’a (Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shi‘r*, 1.322).

perform Paleo-Muslim ritual requirements, they would nevertheless withhold payments that had been exacted during his lifetime, according to agreements reached with him personally.²²⁰ In any case, Muḥammad's customary allocation of the quarter or the fifth of booty to himself had often been resented.²²¹

In similar cases before, as for instance when Kinda decided to stop the payment of dues to the kings of al-Ḥīra, this resulted in the dispatch of a campaign against them.²²² In the case of the Ridda, continuity with personal arrangements made with Muḥammad was denied by a variety of parties to his commonwealth by the removal of tokens of submission, and this was vigorously resisted. Some lineages of Rabi'a in the eastern Peninsula even sought to renew allegiance to their erstwhile masters, epigones of Naṣrids of al-Ḥīra, to the extent of reaffirming royalty to the last of the line, al-Mundhir b. al-Nu'mān b. al-Mundhir (Asmā's brother) in Baḥrayn, but were crushed by Khālīd b. al-Walīd, with the fate of al-Mundhir uncertain and reported variously.²²³ Others, also in the east and in Oman, assumed royal prerogatives, including coronation,²²⁴ as tokens of independence. In effect, these wars engulfed the entirety of the Arabian Peninsula, and fanned out in all directions. The only exceptions to this general state of revolt were the latest – and arguably most significant – converts, Quraysh and Thaḳīf of al-Ṭā'if, assuring a relatively stable base for campaigns in the Ḥijāz.²²⁵

No purpose will be served by narrating the story of the Ridda wars. This term was carelessly used in the sources and by modern scholarship as well, laden with inappropriate ideas of 'apostasy'. *Ridda* referred originally to campaigns against Ghaṭafān, Ṭay' and Tamīm, north-east of Medina, and subsequently generalised.²²⁶ Two elements need to be highlighted nevertheless.

The first is that these were not Wars of Apostasy, but initially a campaign to regain control over territories and their inhabitants with existing agreements with Muḥammad. As ambition grew with success, campaigns were extended to territories that had not, in all probability, concluded agreements with the Muḥammadan regime, and ultimately resulted in the pacification of the Arabian Peninsula under the control of Medina.²²⁷ As a

²²⁰ Al-Kilā'i, *Ridda*, 3, 42; TAB, 523.

²²¹ For instance, *SIH*, 4.166 ff.

²²² *AGH*, 11.31.

²²³ TAB, 545, 547; al-Hillī, *Manāqib*, 159.

²²⁴ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.131.

²²⁵ Al-Kilā'i, *Ridda*, 5 ff.; TAB, 523 ff.

²²⁶ Shoufani, *Riddah*, 72 ff., 105.

²²⁷ See the excellent map of these campaigns, and of the early conquests outside the Peninsula, in the *Tübingen Atlas*, B.vii.2. Shoufani's *al-Riddah* is organised territorially, which is well suited to the nature of these wars. Cf. the comments of de Prémare, *Ta'īs*, 133.

prelude to abrogating the treaty of al-Ḥudaybiyya and his assault on Mecca, as he felt able to act without needing to depend on the cooperation of pagan allies, Muḥammad declared that treaties concluded with Unbelievers would be abrogated after a grace period of four months from the time of the *ḥajj*, and before that if they had been broken by the other parties (Q, 9.1 ff.).²²⁸ Two areas that had not been subdued by Muḥammad were of particular importance, both of which witnessed autonomistic movements related to the vagaries of the increasingly uncertain Sasanian influence, al-Yamāma and Yemen; in the latter, there was also the indigenist revolt against the *abnā'*, descendants of Persian residents and troops.²²⁹

Neither area seems to have paid tribute to Medina during Muḥammad's lifetime, local leaderships, seemingly more stable in Yemen than in al-Yamāma during the last years of Muḥammad's life, feeling more entitled than Medina to local revenue and tribute, and resistant to the new religion. Successive chiefs of al-Yamāma (or perhaps contemporary chiefs of different regions within, as chronologies are uncertain), Hawdha b. 'Alī, Sumāma and Musaylima, seem to have wanted, from a presumption of parity, to share Arabian dominance with Medina;²³⁰ another chief, Thumāma b. Uthal, eventually sided with Muḥammad's party. In Yemen, al-Aswad al-'Ansī had managed to carve out a dominion that stretched from Aden up to just south of al-Ṭā'if, along a band stretching some 100 km from the Red Sea, based on a coalition with Madhḥij going back to the end of the sixth century. His death during an internal revolt, shortly before Muḥammad's, opened the way to the pacification of Yemen during the period of the Ridda.²³¹

The second element that needs to be highlighted is that this situation seems to have been marked by attempts to set up a number of cultic and territorial commonwealths similar to Muḥammad's. Whether this implies that others were following Muḥammad's example, or that Muḥammad contributed most effectively to an emergent pattern, or indeed if the Ridda wars served as a catalyst to this,²³² is not possible to tell. It is in this context that the rival prophecies that flourished during the period of the Ridda can

²²⁸ Rubin ('*Barā'a*') studies this Qur'anic passage in detail, and concludes that traditional interpretations, in modern scholarship and in Muslim historical and exegetical traditions, tend to interpret them in a restricted rather than in a more general sense.

²²⁹ This last aspect was shared with Bahrayn and 'Umān: Shoufani, *Riddah*, 37 f. On relations with the Sasanians: al-Askar, *al-Yamama*, 64 ff., 88, 95, 100 f.; Daghfous, *Yaman*, 331 f.

²³⁰ Donner (*Conquests*, 78 f.) holds this claim to have been for being junior partners.

²³¹ See Barthold, 'Musaylima', 491 f., 495; Shoufani, *Riddah*, 7 f., 30 ff., 83 f., 91 ff., 136 f.; Daghfous, *Yaman*, 311 ff., 321 ff., 331 f., 346; de Prémare, *Ta'asis*, 135.

²³² This is suggested by Eickelman, 'Musaylima', 51.

be understood. The details are often uncertain, conflated and confused, and sometimes phantasmatic, but the overall pattern conveyed is unlikely to have been invented.

There is a fairly clear geographical distribution to these prophecies. One was in Yemen, starting in all probability in AH 7, led by al-Aswad al-Ansī (the derogatory appellation that appears in the Muslim sources: his name was 'Abhala or 'Ayhala), but was crushed rapidly, following the death of its leader, by troops dispatched by Abū Bakr in AH 11.²³³ The other described an arc from north-central Arabia some 200 km east of Taymā', stretching further east then descending in a south-easterly direction to al-Yamāma. Along this arc, bounded to the north by the wastes of al-Nafūd and to the south by the approaches of the even more forbidding wastes of al-Rub' al-Khālī, dwelt lineages of B. Asad, followers of Ṭulayḥa b. Khuwaylid, lineages of Hudhayl, Tamīm and Mālik b. Ḥanzala, whom the prophetess Sajāḥ tried to knit together, with, to the south, the B. Ḥanīfa, followers of Musaylima who may later have married Sajāḥ and cemented a regional alliance which was soon to be defeated.²³⁴ It is uncertain in any case that Ṭulayḥa, who had been raided by Muḥammad himself, made any religious or prophetic claims at all,²³⁵ and there are reports that Sajāḥ may have been a Christian,²³⁶ in the Arabian way of the time.

Prophetic claims and Muslim disparagement apart, what needs to be stressed is that, like others, Ṭulayḥa's cause was ultimately not religious but territorial and autonomistic, and it is here that the campaign against him is congruent with that against Musaylima. The latter is reported to have visited Muḥammad in AH 9, the year which witnessed the arrival of delegations to Medina from all parts of Arabia.²³⁷ But the chronology is highly uncertain, and it is not improbable that Musaylima's prophecy antedated Muḥammad's, and that the two may have met before the Hijra.²³⁸ A letter attributed to him and addressed to Muḥammad is reported to make the claim that the earth – clearly meaning central, northern and western Arabia – is divided into two domains, each with a prophet in the lead, one sustained by Ḥanīfa, the other by Quraysh, a demand reputedly having been made also by his predecessor as lord of the B. Ḥanīfa, and one with

²³³ TAB, 523.

²³⁴ Other reports, going back to Sayf b. 'Umar, construe this joining of forces as having resulted from a campaign by Sajāḥ, supported by Tamīm, against Musaylima's territories: *AGH*, 21.28 f. For this alliance, Eickelman, 'Musaylima', 44 ff. and Kister, 'Musaylima', 23 ff.

²³⁵ Kilā'i, *Ridda*, 33; TAB, 530; 'Ṭulayḥa', *El*; Shoufani, *Riddah*, 99 f.

²³⁶ TAB, 534. ²³⁷ *SIH*, 4.165.

²³⁸ Al-Ḥallāq, *Maslama*, 33 f., 91 ff., but there is no indication that the Apostle travelled to al-Yamāma.

a prehistory in Mecca–Yamāma conflict preceding the Hijra.²³⁹ The same point seems to have been made to Khālīd b. al-Walīd in the course of the Ridda,²⁴⁰ although it must be stressed again that extending these wars to al-Yamāma clearly went beyond a restoration of the status quo ante,²⁴¹ and that the terms of whatever agreement may have been reached between Musaylima and Muḥammad are entirely unclear.

Apocryphal or not, albeit not inherently implausible, what is clear from this anecdote about Musaylima's claims to a rival commonwealth or a concordat with Muḥammad is that the dynamic of the Muḥammadan movement became more compelling and, following the victorious outcome of the Ridda wars under Abū Bakr, acquired elements of durability, and moved towards the elimination of regional opposition altogether.²⁴² The Ridda wars were a turning point in the consolidation and firmer constitution of the Paleo-Muslim Medinan regime. This was signalled, perhaps in the first instance, by the development of armies that were able to strike at ever more distant objectives, and to remain on campaign for a considerably longer duration than they had during Muḥammad's lifetime. The rewards, booty as well as the distribution of conquered lands, were all the more evident, involved greater swathes of the population and were on a scale incomparably greater than hitherto.

Of capital importance was the emergent sense of central command over large territories, with private armies and raiders seeking Medinan approval in most cases, all of which reinforced the idea, and the operations, of a unitary government.²⁴³ It is clear that, under Abū Bakr and his successors, field commanders active in Arabia and beyond, such as Khālīd b. al-Walīd, Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ and al-Mughīra b. Shu'ba, were ultimately representatives of Medina, without a power base of their own, and did, in all, obey central directives, including directives for changes of command. Already by the time of Mu'āwiya's rule over Syria in 640, tribal and communal levies were reorganised into functional units, added to which was the establishment of

²³⁹ Al-Kilā'i, *Ridda*, 57 – the chronology is confused and uncertain: *ibid.*, 58; Ibn Qutayba, *Ma'ārif*, 59; *SH*, 3.77; Ḥallāq, *Maslama*, 37 ff. Again, Sajāh is reported to have said very much the same: *AGH*, 21.28. See Eickelmann, 'Musaylima', 47 f.

²⁴⁰ TAB, 540.

²⁴¹ This may well have been undertaken at the initiative of the impulsive and expansive Khālīd b. al-Walīd, as suggested by Shaban, *History*, 23 f., but it is consonant with the logic of events.

²⁴² This had been reflected during the lifetime of Muḥammad by micro-sociological autonomism competing with incipient Medinan *dirigisme* but under the Paleo-Muslim umbrella, perhaps the most renowned example of which was *masjid al-dīrār* of sections of the B. 'Amr b. 'Awf, on which see 'Mosque of the dissension', *EQ*, 3.438 f., and Nagel, *Mohammed*, 460 f.

²⁴³ For armies during the Ridda, and their consequences as discussed here, see Donner, 'Military institution', 317 f.

two corps of guards, household guards (*ḥaras*) and elite troops on the line (*shurāt*), the latter playing an important role at Şiffin.²⁴⁴

It is also clear from military-historical study that the deployment and redeployment of armies at various fronts, especially in Syria and Iraq, were centrally directed in broad outline. Authority delegated to field commanders was evident at the very beginning of the Ridda (and towards the end of the Umayyad period), and campaigns were pursued from a consolidated base, Medina, followed by Damascus and other points in Syria.²⁴⁵ Probing and scouting operations are in evidence, and there is little indication of wasted, ill-conceived campaigns.²⁴⁶ Added to this was an extraordinarily rapid development of tactics, expedient mobilisation, battle drill, weaponry and leadership, reflecting great adaptability and military talent.²⁴⁷

This Median period was one of extraordinarily energetic expansiveness, militarily and otherwise, with clear signs of a greater measure of central coordination and organisation than is normally conceded, freebooting and individual initiatives notwithstanding, deploying the art of the possible,²⁴⁸ in a manner rather coordinated than simply casting about for something indefinite to do once a battle or engagement had been won. A central instance was brought into relief by the organisation of the conquering armies and by the relatively controlled manner of migration outside the Peninsula.²⁴⁹

This central instance in Medina seems to have acted purposefully throughout: by the broad coordination of events rapidly moving at considerable distances, the appointment and dismissal of commanders, restraints on free-wheeling ambitions.²⁵⁰ There is clear indication of concern with

²⁴⁴ Jandora, *March*, 96. ²⁴⁵ Jandora, *March*, 5, 47 ff., 126. ²⁴⁶ Jandora, *March*, 126, 129.

²⁴⁷ Jandora, *March*, 99 f., 125 ff., who takes up in great detail (chs. 3 and 4) the military character of campaigns in Syria and Iraq. The author (at 23 ff., 51, 131) refers to the similarity between Arabic and Himyarite military terminology, and to the great number of Yemenites engaged in the campaigns.

²⁴⁸ An excellent synoptic account is given by Noth, 'Früher Islam', 62 ff. See Jandora (*March*, ch. 5, *passim*) for affabulation and fancy in literature on the military aspects of the Arab conquests, in modern scholarship as well as in the Arabic sources.

²⁴⁹ See especially Donner, *Conquests*, 8, 221 f., 223 ff. – Nöldeke ('Tradition', 169) had already cast doubt upon considering the Arab conquests as a haphazard affair, a thesis still fairly common, set out extravagantly by Sharon, 'Umayyads', 126 ff., who held that, until the time of 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705), the emergent empire consisted of separate communities under their own leaders. The regional strategic and military panorama is reconstructed with limpid clarity by Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, chs. 14–16. Military dominance and internal security integrating the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea into a system were of course to enhance the prosperity accruing to the Ḥijāz from maritime trade: Heck, *Charlemagne*, 55 ff.

²⁵⁰ Donner ('Centralized authority', 347 ff., 353 ff.) sketches exemplarily the parameters for considering the issue of centralisation, drawing due notice to the complexity of issues involved, not the least of which is the necessary distinction between the conceptual, strategic and operational moments

over-extension and measures to control its consequences, over-extension being a notion conceivable only in the context of a concerted undertaking. The existence of only a most rudimentary bureaucracy in Medina did not seem to hamper the emergent habitus of coordinated command. 'Umar's *dīwān* may have been a means of regulating conflicting prerogatives and claims, and a fiscal device. But it also does go some way towards suggesting an embryonic professionalisation of military engagement, and the possibility of emergent military contingents transcending tribal lines.²⁵¹ Ultimately and in most cases willingly, under civilian control, the military did indeed conclude tax regimes on the ground in lands conquered, but it was the civilian administration, personified by the Caliph in Medina, that oversaw major land-distribution and taxation-related matters.²⁵²

The Medinan interregnum and the natural history of power

Henceforth, once Medinan command overall was assured, conflicts were to be played out in Medina, or sought to make themselves felt and effective in Medina, as Paleo-Muslim armies fanned out into Syria and Iraq and farther afield. The situation emerging was one of vastly expanding scale, with great rapidity. At the centre of developments was Medina, a town now torn between parties claiming ancestral nobility and Paleo-Muslim precedence (*sābiqa*), for which regulation the famous Register (*dīwān*) of 'Umar I was developed as an administrative device;²⁵³ sentiments were envenomed by factionalism and its correlative favouritism.

What was a decisive element for the facilitation of central control, however exercised and to whatever degree, was the operational cohesion of the new ruling class, a cohesion imparted by locality, kinship relations, common experiences, ties of marriage and expectations evolving in common.²⁵⁴ Throughout, consolidation of Medinan dominance, buttressed by conquests far and wide and by the resources thereby made available, yielded across Arabia conditions conducive for the ultimate supremacy of a lineage that was to emerge supreme and that was, on all available indices, favoured

of central authority at the time. He also discusses instructively existing scholarship on this matter (337 ff., 350 ff.).

²⁵¹ Donner, 'Military institutions', 320.

²⁵² Donner, 'Military institutions', 321, 324, who also notes suggestively (319 n. 26) the importance of colonisation for early Roman armies.

²⁵³ Puin, *Dīwān*, §§ III.2, 3 – the term itself, derived from Persian, means a collection of leaves, much like *kitāb*, *ṣaḥīfa* and cognate terms (*ibid.*, 1.3, 1.4 f.), here used in a technical administrative sense of a register.

²⁵⁴ Donner, 'Centralized authority', 359.

by the Apostle. Resistance to Quraysh, and in the long term specifically to the Umayyads, was to persist until the end of their dynasty. It is not insignificant that all of the ten persons whom Muḥammad had designated as destined for Paradise were Quraysh.²⁵⁵

There is little reason to assert that Muḥammad was himself committed to Medinan hegemony in principle,²⁵⁶ rather than to maintain that Meccan favouritism and irredentism were foremost to his mind,²⁵⁷ and that this was in line with the dynamics of Arabian politics and of his clear perception of the socio-political balances in the region he came to dominate. This is well illustrated by Muḥammad's silence on the question of his own succession, clearly allowing matters to sort themselves out in Arab fashion,²⁵⁸ and without serious regard to religious criteria which might not have been well received by the vast majority of Arabs who had been part of the Medinan polity, but who were nevertheless still pagan. Religious criteria had been invoked by the Medinan Anṣār, under Sa'd b. 'Ubāda, chief of the Khazraj, against the Qurayshi claim made at the famous *saqīfa* of B. Sā'ida where Abū Bakr emerged as successor to Muḥammad, but to no avail.²⁵⁹ This notion of priority to be given to early conversion to Muḥammad's cause was put to the test after the Apostle's death as the choice of a successor was being deliberated, and it devolved itself to the confinement of *sābiqa* relevant to this issue to members of Quraysh, to the exclusion of others. One might well interpret this as a sign of confidence that Mecca, under her aristocrats, would ultimately prevail.²⁶⁰ One would also take this as signalling two contrasting visions of legitimism, one based on precedence in relation to the new religion, the other hoarier, based on the notion of a ruling house, which eventually and unsurprisingly turned out to be the Umayyads.²⁶¹

The Umayyads had been biding their time in Mecca, throughout the course of the emergent polity, when Muḥammad and his immediate successors had appointed members of this lineage to high office,²⁶² and in Syria

²⁵⁵ This was duly noted in *TG*, 1.21. ²⁵⁶ As implied by Hinds, 'Murder', 450.

²⁵⁷ And recorded in narratives of very old vintage: for instance, Hammām b. Munabbih, *Ṣaḥīfa*, Arabic text, no. 127.

²⁵⁸ Shaban, *History*, 26 f.; 'Athamina, 'Roots', 4 f.

²⁵⁹ For the succession to Muḥammad in the context of the Medinan/Meccan, aristocratic/commoner settings, see especially 'Athamina, 'Roots', and Shoufani, *Riddah*, 56 ff. See also Landau-Tasseron, 'Tribal society', 187 ff.

²⁶⁰ Cf. TAB, 509 ff., 514 ff. ²⁶¹ Cf. Athamina, 'Roots', 9 ff., 10 n. 36.

²⁶² This is well brought out in the polemical anti-Umayyad discussion of al-Maqrīzī, *al-Nizā'*, 42 ff., 60 ff. Al-Maqrīzī's context of discussion was ultimately typological, comparing the degenerative histories, from prophecy to royalty, of the Muḥammadan and the Mosaic communities (at 95 ff.). This is of course in marked contrast to his teacher Ibn Khaldūn, who preferred an approach from

under Yazīd b. Abī Sufyān and, later, his brother Mu‘āwiya, until events in Medina had played themselves out. Indeed, Syria was the location of the Umayyad and the broader Qurayshi incorporation into Paleo-Islam as a historical force.²⁶³ In the meantime and in terms of the long view of Mecca’s role and the role of her chiefly lineage, the reigns of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar ultimately amounted to an interregnum, ‘Alī’s an unlikely and anachronistic reassertion of the concept of *sābiqa*, by now timed out, and ‘Uthmān’s a somewhat precocious prefiguration of the Umayyad system based upon Quraysh nobility, thereby having come prematurely.²⁶⁴ Muḥammad’s Qurayshi irredentism suggests that his succession in Medina was an interregnum that unfolded in keeping with his prescient expectations, and doubtless with his preferences as well;²⁶⁵ his Meccan loyalty was clearly much more than vestigial or sentimental. Syria, untrammelled by the parvenu elites whose conflicts plagued other provinces of the fledgling empire, was for centuries open at its eastern, northern and western sides, and now opened these sides to the conquests.²⁶⁶

Of Muḥammad’s immediate followers, the stern and choleric ‘Umar was to be particularly hostile to Quraysh,²⁶⁷ and partial to the alliance of Muhājirūn, Anṣār and Ṣaḥāba, and to the Medinan as opposed to the Meccan milieu and its hegemony in general. The conflict that was then played out in Arabia, southern Iraq and the fringes of Syria, and among the Arabs throughout the conquered lands, between the Meccan aristocracy and the Anṣār and others, was to last for some decades. It was to be particularly violent; it sedimented, with its civil wars,²⁶⁸ a permanent impress on Muslim historical writing.²⁶⁹

the natural history of power and its social infrastructures to one from considerations of legitimist politics; he held Umayyad ascendancy to have been in the nature of things, and indeed regarded Mu‘āwiya as the fifth of the Rāshidūn (*Tārīkh*, 2.1140 f.). Legitimist polemics have been taken at face value in modern scholarship, and coloured construals of Muslim political attitudes and theories of government: see al-Azmeh, *Times of History*, ch. 7, 213 f. and *passim*. These polemics also mark attitudes to the Umayyads overall in modern scholarship, expressed with a special sense of repugnance by Madelung, *Succession*, 326 f. The author writes as if he were personally a party to the conflict, describing Mu‘āwiya as ‘an odious little impostor posturing as the Vice-regent of God on earth’. One wonders what criteria, apart from those of inter-Islamic polemical tropes, the author uses to consider questions of legitimacy.

²⁶³ This point is forcefully brought out by Ju‘ayt, *al-Fitna*, 177, 196 f.

²⁶⁴ The point about ‘Uthmān’s actions having been ‘some years ahead’ of their time was made by Landau-Tasseron, ‘Tribal society’, 199.

²⁶⁵ Thus it would be inappropriate to claim that the ultimate reassertion of Meccan aristocratism with the Umayyads was ‘ironical.’ Landau-Tasseron, ‘Tribal society’, 191.

²⁶⁶ On the limited scale of migration into Syria, Donner, *Conquests*, 111 ff., 249, 357 ff.

²⁶⁷ Sayf b. ‘Umar, *al-Jamal*, §§ 108 ff.

²⁶⁸ See now Donner, *Muhammad*, 146 ff.

²⁶⁹ Hinds, ‘Murder’ and ‘Alignments’.

The conclusion of the First Civil War with the triumph of Mu‘āwiya and the declaration of AH 41/661–2 as *‘Ām al-jamā’a*, the Year of Unity, saw the defeat of a very heterogeneous anti-aristocratic coalition, local in its concerns but in the main consisting of soldiery in Iraq and Egypt, around ‘Alī – the Anṣār had committed political suicide by calling in the arriviste provincials who murdered the Caliph ‘Uthmān in July 656, leading to the loss by the Hījāz of its position as the political centre of gravity of the Paleo-Muslim polity.²⁷⁰ The Battle of Yawm al-Ḥarra in 63/683, resulted in the definitive decimation of the Anṣār, as Medina was devastated by Umayyad troops under Muslim b. ‘Uqba al-Murri.²⁷¹ This event was all the more violent as it followed a near-total collapse of Umayyad authority during the Zubayrid interlude, which confined Umayyad control largely to central and southern Syria, and even there it was not altogether secure. The concluding triumph of the Marwānid Umayyads in the Second Civil War came with the capture of Mecca in 692 and the death of ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, leader of the remaining elements of the Quraysh aristocracy still based there – aptly described as a ‘theocratic-genealogical service aristocracy’.²⁷² The anachronism of the Zubayrid revolt may be highlighted by the fact that it left no marks to posterity.²⁷³

State thus came to replace commonwealth, as the Arab conquests set up an Arab empire in the lands of Late Antiquity. It was not so much that western Arabia lost its centre of gravity, which it did as the Anṣār committed political suicide as described, and as Mecca was in the hands of second-tier aristocrats. It was rather that the pull of the older imperial centres rendered Arabia into a backwater.

Yet ultimately, Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān, the first Umayyad Caliph (r. from 657 or 661, according to historiographical and ideological leanings,²⁷⁴ to 680), had an irenic spirit to admit that Quraysh had not been necessarily the mightiest of the Arabs, nor the most plentiful. But he retorted to

²⁷⁰ See Wellhausen, *Arab Kingdom*, 55.

²⁷¹ See Rotter, *Umayyaden*, 40 ff. It is interesting to note, with regard to the reach of Damascus, that the record speed of *barīd*, achieved under Yazīd I, for the distance of about 1,500 km between Damascus and Medina was twelve days, an average of some 125 km per day: Silverstein, *Postal Systems*, 193.

²⁷² ‘Theokratisch-genealogische[r] Verdienstadel’: Rotter, *Umayyaden*, ch. 1, *passim*. On the battle for Mecca, Rotter, *Umayyaden*, 238 ff.

²⁷³ Rotter, *Umayyaden*, 247. Nagel (*Mohammed*, 671 ff.) highlights certain continuities between Ibn al-Zubayr and the regime of ‘Umar, and underlines the social improbability of his rule in Mecca, given local conditions of long duration.

²⁷⁴ The Umayyads regarded themselves as the legitimate successors of ‘Uthmān (‘Athamina, ‘Roots’, 21), in the context of which view ‘Alī’s reign was not only complicit in ‘Uthman’s murder (the Umayyads did precious little to help their kinsman) but also illegitimate.

himself that God had honoured them particularly.²⁷⁵ The illustrious Umayyad panegyrist al-Akhṭal (d. 710) lampooned the Anṣār eloquently.²⁷⁶ Quraysh, and the Umayyads in particular, regarded all complaints against them as motivated by the lack of tolerance of the burdens of the new religion, as the newly disadvantaged complained about inequitable division of wealth accruing from the conquests,²⁷⁷ and some expressed their resentments in pietist terms which were to become standard in later historical writing. As mentioned above, ‘Umar had set up a system of stipends to some degree dependent upon priority in the adoption of the new religion, and these stipends, under Mu‘āwiya, were allocated at the Caliph’s discretion.²⁷⁸ Clearly, the burden of the new religion was set in terms of the Caliph’s discretion.

But one must bear in mind that the situation was one in which the Muḥammadan movement had accumulated sufficient social, political and military dynamism to become ultimately a world-historical actor, at the expense of previous balances of power within the Peninsula, not least as the Syrian border had been broken by the maladroitness of Rome towards the later Jafnids. Yet the mechanisms of war and alliance were themselves also a driving force in the ascent to power of the Umayyads. Their cause célèbre, the murder of ‘Uthmān, a momentous event with aspects of ritual sacrifice,²⁷⁹ was presented under the leitmotif of revenge,²⁸⁰ a matter they shared with their enemy Ibn al-Zubayr.²⁸¹ ‘Uthmān’s blood-stained shirt could be seen displayed on the pulpit of the Damascus mosque,²⁸² together with two fingers from the hand of his young wife, Nā’ila bint al-Farāfiṣa,²⁸³ severed as she was trying to shield him from his murderers. Mu‘āwiya exhorted men, in the time-honoured way with revenge, not to touch women or to wash until vengeance had been exacted;²⁸⁴ the murder of ‘Uthmān was to play a considerable role in the early Umayyad ideology of rule.²⁸⁵ Mu‘āwiya’s stable base in Syria west of the Euphrates was in a

²⁷⁵ Sayf b. ‘Umar, *al-Jamal*, §§ 65 f.; TAB, 784 f.

²⁷⁶ Perhaps most famously: *Dhahabat Quraysih^u bi’l makārimⁱ wa’l-’ulā’wa’l-lu’-m^u taḥt^u ‘amā’imⁱ l-’Anṣār^j*: AGH, 15.75.

²⁷⁷ TAB, 785. ²⁷⁸ Hinds, ‘Alignments’, 367. ²⁷⁹ Ju‘ayt, *al-Fitna*, 114.

²⁸⁰ See Madelung, *Succession*, 334 f. ²⁸¹ Rotter, *Umayyaden*, 25.

²⁸² Ju‘ayt (*al-Fitna*, 182) argues that this display was not made immediately, but that Mu‘āwiya had chosen an appropriate political moment for doing so.

²⁸³ A Kalbī Christian from southern Syria – like Maysūn, the wife of Mu‘āwiya – Nā’ila refused an offer of marriage from him after her husband’s murder. On the overall political character of ‘Uthmān’s later marriages, including this one, Madelung, *Succession*, 369 f.

²⁸⁴ Sayf b. ‘Umar, *al-Jamal*, § 185; TAB, 801 ff; AGH, 16.222 f.; Ḥassān b. Thābit, *Dīwān*, xxx–xxxiii, CLXII–CLXIII.

²⁸⁵ Bin Ḥusayn, *al-Dawla*, 288 ff.

many ways run according to ancestral patterns of alliance and enmity, and still witnessed a number of *ayyām* as tempestuous, bloody and passionate as any previously seen.²⁸⁶ Much the same might be said of some of the Apostle's battles, especially Badr and Uḥud.²⁸⁷

The 'burden of Islam'

Difficult as it may be fully to appreciate what adherence to Muḥammad's new religion implied, what is nevertheless clear is that individual and collective incorporation into his commonwealth did have a number of visible markers, in addition to obligations of alliance. Muḥammad's commonwealth was built around the nucleus of a new cultic association, the boundaries of its temporary Medinan centre declared in the Constitution of Medina to be a *ḥaram*.²⁸⁸ These visible markers were ritual, following the repudiation of erstwhile deities and the spatial and temporal means by which their worship was organised; Mu'awiya's 'burden of Islam' mentioned above was of course of broader remit. It offered emblems of inclusion into a commonwealth construed not only as a community of alliance, protection and raiding, but also as a ritual community counterposed to other ritual communities in place. So while alliances and wars acted as points of accumulation for the durable existence of the Muḥammadan movement, so also did points of accumulation of the ritual order, developing into a *habitus*.

This burden increased after the Ridda wars, as the emergent polity sought both to homogenise matters of worship and to exercise forms of social control over individual persons, and gradually to take in hand matters that had previously been left to custom, as this polity developed into a late antique state while becoming ultimately, not an Arab monarchy like that of the Naṣrids and the Jafnids, but an empire. We have plentiful examples of attempts at regulating personal conduct in the years following Muḥammad's death. This was a sporadic affair throughout the period we are concerned with as with later periods, and, in the Paleo-Muslim phase, Muslim ritual practices became clear only slowly, and their generalisation even slower.²⁸⁹ 'Uthmān banned pigeon-fancying,²⁹⁰ an activity associated

²⁸⁶ For a detailed example, *AGH*, 24.15 ff. War poetry in the Muḥammadan period itself was written in the spirit of the previous era, religious motifs creeping in only gradually during the time of the Ridda: Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 59 ff., 64 f.

²⁸⁷ Stetkevych, *Golden Bough*, 8 f. ²⁸⁸ See also *WAQ*, 712.

²⁸⁹ Tannous, *Syria*, 415 ff., on the period of concern here. ²⁹⁰ Sayf b. 'Umar, *al-Jamal*, § 115.

with low morals. 'Umar is known to have had some drinkers flogged,²⁹¹ although it must be said that the Qur'ān had an ambivalent position on drinking, reflected in Paleo-Muslim poetry.²⁹² The Apostle had himself earlier had one drinker beaten, and struck him himself with a shoe, but protected him from what the truculent and irascible 'Umar had in store for him.²⁹³

During his tenure of the Caliphate, 'Umar is reported to have banned 'temporary marriage', a practice continued uncertainly during the time of Muḥammad, as we have seen, and still supported by some prominent members of Muḥammad's entourage, such as Ibn 'Abbās.²⁹⁴ This permissive practice had for long been common among the Arabs as far away as Mesopotamia.²⁹⁵ 'Umar is reported to have banned cock-fighting, associated with gambling.²⁹⁶ He also banished a recidivist drinker and libertine, Abū Miḥjan al-Thaqafi, to the island of Ḥaḍūdā, where persons of ill repute had earlier been exiled.²⁹⁷ The Medinan period was full of impious poets and drinkers who had been dealt with by the reigning caliphs with a mixture of firmness and delicacy; among their iniquities was a propensity to break ranks by the composition of lampoons.²⁹⁸ Later, the Umayyads had bouts of public moralism as well; Sulaymān b. 'Abd al-Malik, for instance, had the transvestites of Medina – a city which was by all accounts given to hedonism – castrated.²⁹⁹ One Umayyad governor in Mecca had singers ejected from the *ḥaram*, and another, in al-Kūfa, banned singing altogether.³⁰⁰ But, as indicated, these actions tended to be furtive. There

²⁹¹ TAB, 706; Nagel, *Mohammed*, 538 f. One drinker pursued by 'Umar thought that this pursuit was sufficient reason for him to become Christian and to migrate north (Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishtiqāq*, 129). Campaigns against drinking ebbed and flowed for centuries, but did not always disadvantage the public probity of drinkers: AGH, 23.165, 20.116 f., and *passim*.

²⁹² Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 118 ff.; Bell, *Commentary*, 1.167. Al-Muqri' (*al-Khamr*, 62 ff.) brings ample evidence for drinking by Muḥammad and others, and cites the opinion of Abū Ḥanīfa that drinking was a *sunna*. Ibn Ḥazm had also asserted that imposing the *ḥadd* of flogging for drinking was not practised by the Apostle, and that it went counter to both the Qur'ān and the prophetic *sunna* (*ibid.*, 58). During the reign of Mu'awiya, a governor of Medina had a certain Ibn Sayḥān flogged for drinking, for which act he incurred the opprobrium of the Caliph; the later explanation was that the victim had, after all, drunk the *nabid* of Syria, which was not prohibited, not fermented liquor (*khamr*): AGH, 2.162 ff. 'Amr b. Ma'dikarib, the famous Paleo-Muslim warrior, could find in the Qur'ān nothing against drinking (AGH, 15.147). On Arab drinking habits, Jacob, *Beduinleben*, 96 ff.

²⁹³ WAQ, 665.

²⁹⁴ Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, 1189, 1195. There are many uncertainties and confusions about this alleged prohibition: Gribetz, *Strange Bedfellows*, 11 ff. See also Nagel, *Mohammed*, 539 f.

²⁹⁵ Segal, 'Arabs', 105. ²⁹⁶ Al-Jāhiz, *al-Ḥayawān*, 1.295 f.

²⁹⁷ AGH, 19.5 f. Abū Miḥjan escaped eventually, and joined Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ at al-Qādisiyya.

²⁹⁸ Dāwūd, *al-Zandaqa*, 212 ff. It should be noted that such lampooning was at times simply extortionate (Montgomery, *Vagaries*, 218).

²⁹⁹ AGH, 4.192 f.: one report, possibly arising from gossip, relates this to the infatuation with a transvestite by a concubine of Sulaymān's.

³⁰⁰ AGH, 2.227, 137.

is much evidence of impiety by transvestites and by princes in Mecca and Medina throughout Umayyad and early Abbasid times,³⁰¹ and there is ample evidence that the seasons of pilgrimage also afforded ample opportunities for dalliance.³⁰²

But important as was the occasional control by the emergent state over personal behaviour and public morals, more important was the way in which it sought to vest the legitimate deployment of force in itself only. This it did by attempting to take in hand matters of private vengeance, personal defamation and debt.³⁰³ It will be recalled that Muḥammad had vested the matter of vengeance and blood-wit in himself. The Medinan regime tried to strengthen its position as a point of reference and ultimate appeal by attempting to stem any tendencies towards vigilantism without due process, famously under 'Uthmān, a trend later continued under Mu'āwiya and later Umayyads.³⁰⁴ The emergent state thus sought to make itself, not always consistently or successfully, the ultimate arbiter between individuals and groups, and this particular aspect is well reflected in contemporary poetry.³⁰⁵ God 'stood above blood', and the introduction of talion in legalistic mode marks the transition from revenge to punishment with due process,³⁰⁶ both elements of an emergent, rationalising legal order transcending custom.

A certain measure of coordinated order was being established. In cases of blood-wit, matters were sometimes rendered extraordinarily complex due to the alliances of lineages in relation to state authority which sometimes offered to pay blood-wit itself, making itself vulnerable to both resistance and opportunism.³⁰⁷ In most cases, the emergent state either responded to developing situations in tune with imperatives of the moment and with occasional reference to the new religion and its Book in a vague and general way, or appealed to specific precedents, all in the context of growing rationalisation – witness, for instance, the Qur'ānic injunction against those who give short weights in the market place (Q, 83.1–3).³⁰⁸

³⁰¹ AGH, 4.195, 198, 235.

³⁰² Most famously by the many anecdotes about the dalliances of 'Umar b. Abī Rabi'a, perhaps most amply in AGH, 1.126 ff. and Index (vol. 25). See the hemistichs of Dhū'r Rumma: *tamām* 'l-ḥajj' *an taqif* 'l-maṭṭayāl 'alā Kharqā' wādī'at 'l-lithāmī (AGH, 24.49).

³⁰³ For instance, AGH, 12.210, 18.122 f.

³⁰⁴ Sayf b. 'Umar, *al-Jamal*, §§ 39 ff., 82, 117; AGH, 2.162 ff. At an unspecified date we have a report of a certain 'Abd Yaghūth, of the B. al-Ḥārith b. Ka'b, having been the first man to be executed for murder in Medina: AGH, 16.224. See the comments of Morony, *Iraq*, 84.

³⁰⁵ Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 122 f. ³⁰⁶ Wellhausen, *Arab Kingdom*, 14; Prokosch, *Blutrache*, 62 f.

³⁰⁷ See AGH, 19.148 f., for a particularly involved affair in which 'Abd al-Malik intervened personally.

³⁰⁸ Imperial Arab weights and measures had to await the reign of 'Abd al-Malik for standardisation, using Hījāzi values: Donner, *Muhammad*, 209.

Crucial for understanding this facet of Paleo-Islam is the realisation that the burden of Islam was not something that was counterposed to laxity; the profile of what constituted rigorous conduct was still evolving slowly, and any assumptions to the contrary would be anachronistic. And lest it be thought that a formal jurisprudence were being applied, detailed study of 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr concluded that whatever legal judgments he had made were determined by appeal to the Muḥammadan example. This was not so much a prescriptive juristic act in any technical sense as much as the invocation of an emergent tradition of exemplarity:³⁰⁹ in this case, prophetic tradition, *sunna*, regarded as a living tradition as distinct from the technical sense later formalised as *ḥadīth*, *sunna* meaning salutary example that was not yet predominantly or exclusively that of Muḥammad himself.³¹⁰ A certain invocation of general principles, later to become technical elements of jurisprudence, is in evidence fairly early.³¹¹ This was a tendency that was deepened with time, and ultimately resulted in the emergence of a formal legal system whose institutes were eventually to be embodied in the system of Muslim law.

Quite apart from the occasional display of concern for public morals and the solicitation of apostolic exemplarity, the 'burden of Islam' was, in addition, a burden of cultic practice and ritual observance productive of visible tokens of the new religion, including rituals of a linguistic nature. Incipient items of belief did exist in formulaic statements correlative with the Qur'ānic statements, relating to the unicity of divinity and the commission of Muḥammad. Their declamation and repetition constituted ritual practice, acting as tokens of adherence to a cultic community and of division from others.³¹² In this way, the elementary formulae of Paleo-Muslim belief, when declaimed, acted as the auditory complement of their inscription onto rock, and complemented a number of bodily practices which betokened adherence to Paleo-Islam. All were acts performed in public. In the case of 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr, for instance, construed in Muslim traditions as an exemplar of accomplished Medinan piety, there is no reason to suppose that writings attributed to him which have not survived contain

³⁰⁹ Von Stülpnagel, 'Urwa', 55 f.

³¹⁰ Earlier references to this term acquired a specific reference to the Prophet, most likely by a slight interpolation, as in at least one account of the agreement at Šifīn, on which Hinds, 'Šifīn', *passim*. More generally, Bravmann, *Spiritual Background*, 123 ff.

³¹¹ Thus Motzki, *Origins*, 114 ff., 135 ff., 156 f., *contra* the extremism of Schacht's positions.

³¹² Tannous (*Syria*, ch. 12) provides much evidence for the uncertainty of doctrine, the persistence of practices associated with Christianity and other religions in place everywhere, and the imprecision of conversion, quite correctly (406) noting that one must not have in mind the Islam of ninth-century Baghdad when dealing with the early period of concern here.

much more than the meagre doctrinal content found in his extant works;³¹³ what applies to him is likely to apply to others. Apart from the repudiation of paganism and the profession of faith in one God, now transcendent and omnipresent, and in His host of angelic and demonic subordinates, little was or could be expected. Belief in the prophecy of Muḥammad only gradually acquired the theological and salvational-historical profile which was to become standard later, over and above his charisma.

The measure of piety

The ritualisation of certain aspects of life in Muḥammad's Commonwealth and the order that emerged from it after the wars of Ridda was, as suggested, an emblem of incorporation and commitment both individual and collective. To the new, exotic deity belonged a cult requiring regular acts of worship, a ritual habitus punctuating the daily lives of Paleo-Muslims with bodily movements increasingly associated with specific times and places, some of which may have appeared arbitrary to new adherents to Muḥammad's cause, but which were all the more effective for being so, just as, as has been suggested, the new beliefs were the more effective for appearing strange and arbitrary. These rituals marked off the Paleo-Muslims from others, and individual Paleo-Muslims from their own past lives and practices, and promoted the new, arbitrary habitus to the rank of drill.

That this was all fired by an intense and militant piety, and by apocalyptic fears,³¹⁴ is a view that would tally with retrospective historiographical patterning.³¹⁵ It is an old trope at once of polemic and of scholarship. But it needs to be taken with a handful of salt, and without succumbing to confusing the typical and the exemplary.³¹⁶ At bottom, this image of a swarm of militant pietists represents, or at least suggests, the unreflected image and rhetorical trope of the enthusiast, understood in its technical religious sense, the image of unflinchingly monomaniacal action, fired by an abstract idea, which has been attributed to a number of religious

³¹³ Von Stülpnagel, 'Urwa', 40 ff., 147. ³¹⁴ For instance, Donner, *Narratives*, 64 ff.

³¹⁵ See Sizgorich, 'Narrative'. It would be well to note that, as suggested by Neuwirth (*Koran*, 185), the Qur'an presents no salvation-historical drama.

³¹⁶ Ju'ayr (*al-Fitna*, 68 f., 73, 196, 128), a particularly good historian, succumbs sentimentally to a totalising religious/enthusiastic interpretation of the politics of Muḥammad and his successors. Nevertheless (at 201 f., 201 n. 2), he does aver that, at the Battle of Šiffin, only a small minority fought 'for religion', the rest animated by an ethos of honour and loyalty; as evidence, he quoted the cry *al-baqiyya, al-baqiyya* ('the rest, the rest'), indicating the realisation that too much blood had been shed, and that at least some of those present should stay alive.

movements regarded as displaying extraordinary intensity of belief and ritual. This standard mass-psychopathological image, born of the Reformation, underlies most standard accounts of Muslim beginnings.³¹⁷ In this context, 'militant piety' might be seen to stand for enthusiasm, 'the nobler cousin' of fanaticism,³¹⁸ a term which came into currency later, albeit one 'often with an implication of more heat than light'.³¹⁹ It must be said in fairness that this use of 'militant piety' is not always party to the view, important for the technical use of the term, that enthusiasts were crazed and deluded, or that they held false beliefs, although these undertones and overtones are unavoidable when the term is used, and the image conjured up.

Beyond the trope, there seems to be little to justify this interpretative supposition, and it seems in large measure to be an anachronistic description. Intense and enthusiastic piety may very well have been in evidence, but it can only be indicated as a motivating factor in a very general and vague way. It is not so much that intensity of sentiment and commitment is not measurable; affective conditions are not describable in a manner adequate for the imputation of causality. As for apocalyptic expectations and fears, these overtook other, more traditional anxieties, and their interpretative centrality is likely to belong to later conditions and to other places than those with which the present discussion is concerned.

In any case, in order to have consequences for historical consideration, discussion of piety would need to remove itself from the image of a ferocious monomania and concentrate more on the social and ritual registers of

³¹⁷ The Romans used the term *fanatici* to refer to one particular cult (that of Bellona); Josephus wrote of the Zealots; Christian heresiographers and bishops railed against and condemned the Mesopotamian Euchites or Messalians, called *mšallyāna* in Syriac, in the fourth century (they survived until the ninth century), and against the monolatrous Euphemites; Muslims wrote and acted against the *ghulāt*, or exaggerators, and the Kharijites. But none of these seems to have had the full complement of descriptive items that were later to be gathered together in Reformation polemics against Enthusiasm and the more striking image of the swarm in *Schwärmerei*, and to yield the Enlightenment image of Muḥammad the fanatic enthusiast, most comprehensively expressed, in integral conceptual profile, by Hegel; prior to that, he was generally considered as a sham prophet who wielded the sword. See in general the overall considerations, largely confined to Germany and France, of 'Fanatismus', *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. Tucker (*Enthusiasm*) provides a wide-ranging discussion of English usage, including its 'meliorative extension' from the time of the Enlightenment (at 18 and ch. 7, *passim*), with references to Islam and the figure of Muḥammad who, in one polemical context, had in Cromwell a true successor (at 36, 54, 95). Tucker (at 24) proposes an 'ostensive definition' of the term, meaning the identification of instances to be subsumed under a general nominal category, in itself not very clearly defined. See also Toscano, *Fanaticism*, xvi f., xx f., 68 ff., 101 ff., 150 ff. On the semantic fields of the German *Schwärmerei*, a word even more visually suggestive of fevered psychopathology than 'enthusiasm' and 'fanaticism', see Schröder, 'Schwärmerei', 1478, who also (at 1480) cites Kant on Muḥammad in this regard.

³¹⁸ Toscano, *Fanaticism*, xxi.

³¹⁹ Tucker, *Enthusiasm*, viii.

piety, beyond the manner in which psychological dispositions to piety were later asserted and painted profusely.³²⁰ The psychological dispositions of Paleo-Muslim individuals, as of all others, are hard to describe from this distance, and belief is difficult to qualify.³²¹ A disposition to pietism, and the ascription of an introspective piety to Paleo-Muslims, needs to be seen in a social context.³²² The description of Paleo-Islam as strictly pietistic, dedicated to rigorous observance and to ushering in an era of righteousness, is based on pious formulae and *ḥadīth* texts, rather than on social practices, and modelled upon the images of radical Protestantism, contemporary Islamism and the post-Tridentine emphasis on personal conscience, rather than reflecting historical practices.³²³ In any case, the image does not fit an age where means and mechanisms of communication were such as to render this improbable.

Anachronistic models apart, what is being suggested here is that scholarship would need to be attentive less to psychodramatic scenarios of piety than to the workings of history. Qur'ānic injunctions to piety, under the title of Commanding Righteousness and Forbidding Wrong, are unclear as to their meaning, and are difficult to narrow down to any specific notion of duty.³²⁴ Under other titles, such as *birr*, *tuqā* or *dīn*, piety might better be seen in relation to social imperatives of trustworthiness towards one's own, without the need for elaborations in terms of theology or ethical theory;³²⁵ *tuqā* and *taqwā* might better be seen as faithfulness to agreements and treaties,³²⁶ than as a condition of piety, which it later became. An interpretation of Paleo-Muslim piety, and of the term *wara'*, as a communal condition of perpetual propitiation would be widely off the mark. Finally, research into this matter might profitably seek out a specific index, related to ritual prayer: the introduction and wider acceptance, in principle and in practice, of the private rather than the public performance of what became the five daily prayers, according to the sequence of steps that became standard eventually. In this context, it will emerge that the transition from

³²⁰ For instance, with regard to the Wise Men of Medina: von Stülpnagel, 'Urwa', 20 ff. On the image of 'Urwa: *ibid.*, 16 ff., and cf. Schacht, *Origins*, 144 ff. In all, the accent on piety, especially systemic piety, here as elsewhere in studies of religion, seem to derive from a pietistic Protestant redaction of religious history – see, for instance, Hodgson, *Venture*, 1.72, 117 ff.

³²¹ Cf. Noth, 'Früher Islam', 69. ³²² Cf. Bourdieu, 'Genèse', 312.

³²³ So Donner, *Narratives*, 85 ff., and *Muhammad*, 66 f., 78 ff., although one does sympathise with *ibid.*, xi f., where the author disputes the unduly cynical view adopted by many strands of modern scholarship. Ultimately explaining Paleo-Islam and its conquests in terms of militant piety, of enthusiasm and zeal, is of the same order of explanation as one invoking divine intervention.

³²⁴ Cook, *Commanding Right*, 15.

³²⁵ This is well reflected in Paleo-Islamic poetry: Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 94 f.

³²⁶ Cf. Bravmann, *Background*, 117.

cult limited in space and time, to pious religion properly so called, occurs when religious action transcends the times and places of ritual, and becomes a personal habitus.

Clearly, these psychological predispositions were so painted only after a doctrinal, homiletic, scriptural, social and institutional development made possible the construal of piety and of the pietist as distinct from the vatic seer, the confederate and the enthusiast. Paleo-Islamic soteriology meant membership of the community, before a sense of individual sin or guilt arose.³²⁷ Awareness of hermits and monks, bizarrely fascinating, is insufficient to project such a view of pietism. For pietism to arise and then to characterise a social and individual type, there needs to have developed both institutions of sustained worship, socially embedded and maintained by an institutional or otherwise exemplary personnel purveying a pietist discourse, and a particular type of personal relationship to the object of worship attendant upon the emergence of notions of individuality, beyond God's requirements for propitiation and supplication. Individual piety, including renunciation of the world, is thinkable as a social phenomenon only in the context of conditions which allow for individualism, and for the social and cultural recognition and incorporation of such persons. The figure of Muḥammad as an exemplar of piety was to emerge later. Paleo-Muslim figures that were to be construed as paradigms of exemplary piety were political actors, and they would be seriously misconstrued if taken quite simply for pietists.³²⁸

We can place the beginnings of Muslim pietism, an aspect of the constitution of what was later to become Islam, in southern Iraq a century after Muḥammad, exemplified by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī³²⁹ and others, or perhaps a little earlier. All were witnesses to the progressive rationalisation, in the Weberian sense, of the new faith, and its routinisation, including the routinised construal of religious sentiment.³³⁰ These were related to technologies of the self whereby practices of reading, meditation, prayer, asceticism, came to constitute pious individuals; regulative ideas and exempla are not in themselves sufficient to create pious selves, and require contexts of practice. This was a trend distinct from what in Syria had continued as a collective *hijra* emblematised by ritual and war,³³¹ although it must be said that Umayyad Syria had its fair share of ascetics, with similarities to

³²⁷ *TG*, 1.8, and Weber, *Sociology*, 264. ³²⁸ See Elad, 'Community', 248 ff., 256 ff.

³²⁹ On whose sanctification, see Mourad, *Early Islam*, 25 ff.

³³⁰ One of the most satisfactory sketches of the rise of Muslim pietism in Iraq, a century or so after the Arab conquests, is found in Morony, *Iraq*, 448 ff.

³³¹ *TG*, 1.62.

Christian hermeticism with its night vigils, recitations, weeping and seclusion, along with inter-denominational 'holy men' and healers.³³² Umayyad state praxis, especially after the failure of the 717–18 expedition against Constantinople, worked towards establishing a military aristocracy on the Byzantine frontier, cultivating an ideology of *jihād*, militant piety, and construed, especially later, in terms of a combination of ascetic piety and military valour.³³³ This image of an ascetic military caste representing the hard edge of the community,³³⁴ later to appear as narratives of exemplary figures of ascetic piety and virtue,³³⁵ combined the idioms of imperialism, Arab aristocratic valour and late antique piety.³³⁶ 'Militant piety' is much too simple and stereotyped a view.

Prohibitions and commands

Moving from these considerations to concrete manifestations of the new religion, ritual developments proceeded, as expected, both negatively, by abolition, and positively, by adaptation and innovation. These took place against the backdrop of pagan time and pagan space, reflected in the adoption of a lunar calendar, the eradication of cultic activities at sunrise and sunset, the downgrading of animal sacrifice, and the destruction of all but one pagan cultic site. It has also been noted that certain games of chance were associated with pagan worship, especially with sacrificial practices, and it is significant that the Qur'ānic verse against gambling mentioned this activity together with the ban on consuming sacrificial flesh not consecrated to Allāh and of blood (Q, 5.3, 90) – blood being consumed and smeared over cult objects, having been regarded as God's lot.³³⁷

We have seen that the consumption of wine was similarly associated. There is also some evidence,³³⁸ difficult to interpret but nevertheless suggestive, that the consumption of fermented *sawīq* or some other inebriating substance made of raisins from al-Ṭā'if was available to pilgrims at the moment of desacralisation following pilgrimage, into the eighth century.³³⁹ Other dietary prohibitions, especially relating to pigs, fish without scales

³³² Livne-Kafri, 'Ascetics', 107 and *passim*; Tannous, *Syria*, 457 ff.

³³³ Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence*, 4 ff., 122 ff., 136, 142. ³³⁴ Weber, *Sociology*, 165 f.

³³⁵ Such as the figures of Ibn Adham and Ibn al-Mubārak: Sizgorich, *Violence*, 171 ff., 181 ff., who also takes up (at chs. 7 and 8) similarities and transformations with Khārijism and the figure of Ibn Ḥanbal.

³³⁶ Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence*, 7; Sizgorich, 'Narrative', 39.

³³⁷ Bonte, 'Sacrifices', 40 f., and cf. Qatāt, *al-'Arab*, 238, 300.

³³⁸ Al-Azraqi, *Makka*, 461.

³³⁹ Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Pèlerinage*, 89 ff., 98 n. 3.

and wild ass, were also introduced piecemeal.³⁴⁰ These reflected a variety of prohibitions, some having affinities with Judaism and Zoroastrianism, others not. But their ultimate geneses remain obscure; in the eighth century, similar prohibitions extended from Ethiopia to Armenia, and were present in Miaphysite canon law,³⁴¹ which may reflect a layer of regional rather than religion-specific practices earlier than Islam.

Dietary prohibitions were of course closely correlated with what could legitimately be eaten, and all flesh to be consumed needed to be slaughtered in a specific way, the animal facing a particular direction, towards the *qibla* in classical Muslim law, accompanied by an invocation and blessing of Allāh.³⁴² In effect, this preserves one element of pagan sacrifice: consecration, duly generalised to cover all acts of slaughter which were no longer cultic, including the consumption of meat slaughtered by People of the Book (Q, 5.5), but intended for everyday consumption unrelated to specific times or places.

As a complement, ritual sacrifice was preserved, but ultimately restricted to a feast following the fast of Ramaḍān,³⁴³ seemingly introduced during the second year after the Hijra, the month having been hitherto associated with the summer solstice.³⁴⁴ It is very difficult to sketch the evolution of the Ramaḍān season of fasting and other forms of abstinence,³⁴⁵ but

³⁴⁰ For instance, *SIH*, 3.213 (wild ass), supposedly upon the conquest of Khaybar. However, as with other animals except pigs, this prohibition was not a matter of consensus in earlier Paleo-Muslim times: al-Damīrī, *al-Ḥayawān*, 1.321. It must be said that a scan of Arabic writings on animals and animal lore does not reveal any particular reason, connected with early Arab beliefs, that might explain the prohibition on consuming wild ass (whose flesh was much appreciated: Jacob, *Beduinenleben*, 115), although Theodoret of Cyrrhus does report of certain Arabs refusing to eat wild ass and camel flesh (Doran, *Lives*, 77); Arabic poetry, uncharacteristically, does not reveal much about this animal (al-Nuʿaymī, *al-Uṣṭūra*, 195). For the various associations of this animal, see al-Jāhīz, *al-Ḥayawān*, at Index, and al-Damīrī, *al-Ḥayawān*, 1.326, for its association with evil deeds in oneiromancy. See Gräf, *Jagdbeute*, 196 ff., for these matters, and for distinctions between domesticated animals and animals hunted. Serjeant (Review of Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 472) suggests a tantalising association, possibly generalisable, between hunting the ibex and pre-Islamic gods, but unfortunately provides no sources – but see the comments of Bonte ('Sacrifices', 42) relating to a declaration of intent (*nīyya*) prior to hunting for sacrificial purposes, a declaration incorporated into what became Muslim slaughter. That these prohibitions were piecemeal and perhaps also furtive (and liable to suspension in case of need) is illustrated by the lack of any comment by Muḥammad as his companions hunted and consumed wild ass during the campaign against Tabūk: WAQ, 1035 f.

³⁴¹ Cook, 'Dietary laws', 264 f. ³⁴² 'Dhabīḥa', *EL*.

³⁴³ *US*, § 105. ³⁴⁴ *US*, 105; TAB, 363; Wensinck, 'New year', 5, 10.

³⁴⁵ Our sources are particularly unhelpful for reconstructing the ritual developments of the Paleo-Muslim period, be they concerned with prayer, fasting or ritual purity. The material assembled in the Muslim sources under the title of *asbāb al-nuzūl* are extraordinarily sparse when it comes to these topics. A recent statistical study (Jamal, *Asbāb*, 156 ff. and the sources there cited) indicated that Qur'ānic references relating to ritual prescriptions constitute only 14–17 per cent of those Qur'ānic references that are provided with historical contexts of emergence.

what can be said is that evidence indicates that arrangements associated with it changed during the lifetime of the Apostle, with increasing rigour and length of the fasting period. The chronology and many of the details remain uncertain.³⁴⁶ But it does appear that a number of arrangements were introduced, later to be modified or abandoned. Fasting on the 10th of Muḥarram, the day of 'Āshūrā', possibly inspired by a Jewish practice, may well have been involved,³⁴⁷ as was some association of fasting periods with the pagan *ayyām ma'dūdāt* already encountered, as well as other associations with the seasonal festival of Rajab with its sacrifices. Ultimately, Ramaḍān was established as the Paleo-Muslim sacred month, and made to contain the *ayyām ma'dūdāt* as well as *laylat al-qadr*,³⁴⁸ in line with the transformations of temporal rhythms introduced by Paleo-Islam. Matters may well have awaited the time of 'Umar I before the fasting of Ramaḍān became a 'pillar' of the new religion, and its practice was made general, by central directive.³⁴⁹ The fast of Ramaḍān is not mentioned in the Qur'an.

Ascetic aspects initially associated with Ramaḍān were mitigated over time,³⁵⁰ although this may have been a reflection of habituation to this long and rigorous fast, very unpopular at the start,³⁵¹ rather than an actual mitigation. Fasting for a whole month, and breaking the fast only at sunset, was rigorous enough in itself.³⁵² Ascetic practices like night vigils, in Ramaḍān or otherwise, with which sources are replete, are not credible, being inconsistent with what is known of the period. Muḥammad's own night vigils were incumbent upon him only.³⁵³

Indeed, it is reported that Muḥammad had stated that Muslims who enjoyed the protection (*dhimma*) of God are those who, together, pray according to a particular manner, facing a common *qibla*, and who eat

³⁴⁶ For the cocktail of views on the institution of the Paleo-Muslim fast, and their supposed origins, see Wagendonk, *Fasting*, ch. 3.

³⁴⁷ Burton ('Notes', 41 ff.) argues that this is apocryphal. There were some who fasted on the 10th of Muḥarram, the day of 'Āshūrā', associated with the Passover (TAB, 363), but this was not to have much future consequence, although the day itself was later to be celebrated in a different context by the Shī'a.

³⁴⁸ The discussion of Neuwirth ('Ramaḍān', *EQ*, 4.339 ff.) is the most satisfactory to date. Wagendonk (*Fasting*, ch. 4) reconstructs the chronological order of the relevant Qur'anic pericopes, and discusses (60 f., 120, 122, 177) the calendrical position of holy days and nights and the establishment of Ramaḍān as the holy month incorporating other times. See also 'Fasting', *EQ*, and cf. Bell, *Commentary*, 2.180.

³⁴⁹ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.140. ³⁵⁰ Lech, *Geschichte*, ch. 2, *passim*.

³⁵¹ This is reflected in contemporary poetry: Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 105 f.

³⁵² There may have been parallels among Christians breaking fast only at sunset: Bell, *Commentary*, 1.38.

³⁵³ It has been suggested these were acts of penance connected with the Zaynab episode, leading to a review of the chronology of the relevant *sūra* (al-Muzzammil) – Maghen, 'Intertwined triangles', 85 ff.

what other Muslims have slaughtered,³⁵⁴ the classical markers of adherence to a cultic community which had also been a sacrificial community. The ordinary meal is thereby treated as if it were an extension of the sacrificial banquet, a practice earlier adopted by the Jews, and present strongly, under different conditions, in Brahminical practices.

This is all part of the ritual register upon the bodies of believers, of which circumcision is perhaps the best-known marker – a very ancient practice, prevalent among the Arabs, not mentioned in the Qur'ān, but later construed as prophetic *sunna* re-enacting the Abrahamic Covenant.³⁵⁵ Thus marked, the body of the believer is then trained into a regime of ritual cleanliness attendant upon the performance of rituals, and further trained by the repeated and punctual performance of these rituals, according to daily and annual rhythms. Following former Arabian – and ubiquitous – ritual purification before embarking upon acts of cultic worship, followers of Muḥammad needed, among other connected matters, to perform ritual ablutions before prayers, and to perform acts of purification after sexual union,³⁵⁶ quite apart from the regime of ritual purity required during pilgrimage. This was a theme of purity, not very clear *ab initio*, and very likely to have been made general only gradually,³⁵⁷ that was later to crystallise into a systematic and complex system of the purity and impurity of various substances, and of pure and impure states relative to the formal performance of ritual acts.³⁵⁸ The transformations of purity regulations, with time and until they came to constitute part of a technical body of law around the middle of the second century of the Hijra, have been studied in detail recently.³⁵⁹

It is extremely difficult to reconstruct the precise content and provisions of purity and pollution suggested, made and unmade over the Paleo-Muslim period. What can be asserted with confidence is that these existed and that they were subject to variations with time until a fairly stable – but not uniform – repertoire emerged.³⁶⁰ Performance of *ṣalāt*, the regular

³⁵⁴ *US*, § 453.

³⁵⁵ 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb is reported to have had Persian converts circumcised (*AGH*, 20.28), but evidence both from chronicles and from treatises of Muslim law shows that it was not always treated as obligatory for converts.

³⁵⁶ Wensinck, 'Entstehung', 68 ff., 75 ff.

³⁵⁷ Cf. 'Ritual purity', *EQ*, 4.499 f. There is no evidence for ritual purity in contemporary poetry: Farrukh, *Frühislam*, III.

³⁵⁸ Reinhart, 'Impurity', 23 and *passim*.

³⁵⁹ Katz, *Body of the Text*, 97 ff. and ch. 4, *passim*; Halevi, *Muḥammad's Grave*, 44, 64 ff., 277 n. 94, and sources there cited.

³⁶⁰ See the discussion of the interventions of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz and of other Umayyads, seemingly deleted from the textual memory of Muslim law: Katz, *Body of the Text*, chs. 3 and 4.

ritual of prayer, an act preceded by ritual purification, was equally one that underwent change, and indeed innovation. There is no evidence that prayer at regular times of the day, as distinct from invocation and supplication (*talbiya* and *du'ā*) and sacrifices at particular locations (both admitted of irregular and ad hoc performance), was known to Arab pagans, and this has long been noted.³⁶¹

Ritual habitus

It would only be natural to assume that what was later to become the Paleo-Muslim *ṣalāt* emerged from previous practices of devotion and supplication (*du'ā*), conjoined with oaths,³⁶² to which one would need to add the verbal acclamations of divinity according to formulae of incantation not dissimilar in tenor to those encountered in *talbiya* exclamations.³⁶³ Poetic evidence indicates, further, that the term *ṣalāt* was slow to enter the common lexicon, prayer having earlier been indicated by the terms *du'ā*' (supplication) and *sujūd* (prostration), together embroiled in a generic sense of worship.³⁶⁴ The imposition and general acceptance of a cumulative ritual, habitus-forming vector for the constitution of Muḥammad's commonwealth was accompanied by lexical change.

It is difficult to see how the standard pattern of bodily movements and enunciations that, apart from other and in all probability later legal conditions, came to constitute the performance of the *ṣalāt* ritual prayer at fixed times, emerged and evolved. References to Jewish practices, ubiquitous in modern Western scholarship, are sometimes suggestive in a general way, but unhelpful historically.³⁶⁵ It is not yet known when and where the rituals and rhythms of *ṣalāt* – which, lexically, referred to the solicitation of benedictions³⁶⁶ – became standardised in detail. We do know that, at least initially, the clapping of the hands that we saw in the course of pagan ritual was retained for women during prayer.³⁶⁷ We do not know how the sequences of movements and utterances, disposition of hands and arms or

³⁶¹ Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, 39; Ryckmans, *Religions arabes*, 11; 'Du'ā', *El*. On a similar distinction with regard to Judaism, Sawyer, *Sacred Languages*, 132 f.

³⁶² 'Prayer', *EQ*, 4.228 f.

³⁶³ Baumstark ('Gebetstypus', 236 f., 238 f., 243) studied these formulae well, but was more interested in tracing them back to devotional formulae in Christianity and Judaism. On acclamations of God (*takbīr*), see, further, Horovitz, 'Bemerkungen', 254 ff.

³⁶⁴ Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 98, 102 f.; Abū Raḥma, 'Qirā'a', 113 f.

³⁶⁵ See, throughout and with unflinching determination, Mittwoch, *Entstehungsgeschichte*. For comments seeking to redress the overall balance with due regard to local conditions, see Howard, 'Aspects', 41.

³⁶⁶ *LA*, q.v. ³⁶⁷ Hammām b. Munabbih, *Ṣaḥīfa*, Arabic text, no. 91; 'ṣ-l-h', *LA*.

prostrations evolved, although prostrations, and other gestures as well, are most likely have constituted part of previous cultic practices. The Paleo-Muslim terms for prostration and prayer are attested in pre-Islamic poetry, and it would be strange indeed if this prostration in prayer and supplication, ubiquitous in the region, were not to constitute part of pagan rituals.³⁶⁸ Kneeling, standing and prostration are mentioned in the Qur'ān (Q, 2.43, 4.103, 5.6, 9.112, 50.4), but the exact sequences and postures prescribed are vague.³⁶⁹ We have evidence that in 21/642 the governor of al-Kūfa, Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ, scourge of the Sasanians, victor of the Battle of al-Qādisiyya, and one of the earliest Muslims and indeed one of the ten assured a place in Paradise by the Prophet, was dismissed by 'Umar after complaints that he could not conduct prayer properly,³⁷⁰ reflecting in all likelihood the want of standardisation, which must be associated with other complaints against him. The same might be gathered from observations on the peculiarities of 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr's prayer postures.³⁷¹

Be that as it may, the *ṣalāt* was a fundamental feature of Paleo-Islam from its earliest times, mentioned in the Qur'ān sixty-five times in the singular definite form. What can be ascertained with a reasonable degree of confidence is that most of these occurrences belong to the Medinan period, particularly to its later part, and are, as might be expected, very often associated with the *zakāt*,³⁷² that other token of adherence to Muḥammad's cause. What might also be asserted with some confidence is that prayer developed out of devotions at sunrise or immediately thereafter, *al-duḥā*, a practice of the Apostle's that aroused no pagan objection, and that later traditions sought to suppress unsuccessfully, but which persisted in the pilgrimage rites.³⁷³ The number of such prayers prescribed daily seems to

³⁶⁸ Al-A'shā, *Dīwān*, 4.11 (with reference to wine); al-Nābighā, *Dīwān*, 2.10 (with reference to a woman). Tottoli ('Muslim attitudes' and 'Bowing and prostration', EQ, 1.254) adduces evidence for the stereotyped image of resistance by proud settled Arabs to prostration, and claims that there was no evidence of prostration to pagan deities and that Muḥammad is likely to have taken this ritual attitude from Christians. But overall, this evidence, predominantly derived from *ḥadīth* to the virtual exclusion of other categories of sources, and reflecting later patterning of Islam's uniqueness and ritual rectitude, is not weighed critically. The argument itself is inherently implausible and almost a priori dismissive of evidence contrary to its central thesis, which could well have built upon evidence for pre-Islamic prostration ('Muslim attitudes', 16) and connected this to practices related in another article by the same author (Tottoli, 'Thanksgiving', *passim*). Cf. the earlier views of the same in Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, 1.39, 41 f. and 'Ṣalāt', *EP*, 4.99.

³⁶⁹ Cf. Chelhod, 'Attitudes', 167. ³⁷⁰ TAB, 706. ³⁷¹ Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 6.483.

³⁷² 'Ṣalāt', *EI*, 8.945. Following Blachère, *Coran*, 1.19, Chelhod ('Attitudes', 164 f.) suggests that the substantive *ṣalāt* as distinct from various conjugated forms of the verb *ṣallā* does not appear until the middle Meccan period, and that those that so appear are later interpolations.

³⁷³ Rubin, 'Morning and evening', 106 f., 109, 110 f., 115 f. Lexical evidence indicates that the term is lacking in exact determination with respect to its relation to sunrise.

have been two initially, one at or just after dawn, and the other ('aṣr) shortly before sunset,³⁷⁴ later followed by a middle prayer.³⁷⁵ Thereafter, two more were added, at least for settled populations, making up what eventually became the five binding daily prayers,³⁷⁶ but this cannot securely be dated to Muḥammad's lifetime.³⁷⁷ The same might be said for the Friday prayers, presupposing urban extension and social heterogeneity.³⁷⁸

There is evidence that, being burdensome and out of keeping with customary practice, the increasing regularity and frequency of prayer were resisted,³⁷⁹ and that Muḥammad himself would, on campaign but on other occasions as well, combine prayers or otherwise postpone or hasten others.³⁸⁰ Night vigils, and night prayers as well, may have been enjoined at some point,³⁸¹ and indications are that an earlier Qur'ānic injunction to their observance was later abrogated.

It has already been suggested that we do not know precisely what sequences of bodily movements and enunciations prayer rituals involved. The likelihood is that they were quite various, and evolved with time towards increasingly greater uniformity as the social texture of Muḥammad's leadership acquired a firmer consistency, and as freelance, pagan or otherwise improvised prayer moved towards the ritualisation of *ṣalāt* with regularity of rhythm and of procedure, however unstable and mutable. What we do know is that they involved recitations of certain Qur'ānic passages, or what eventually became such, up to a point, indeterminate in time, when Qur'ānic recitations as such became an integral and deliberate part of all prayer.³⁸² It would be fair to assume that early

³⁷⁴ It will be remembered that Muḥammad proscribed prayer at sunrise and sunset, though it did persist thereafter, and 'Umar punished those who performed it. See al-Aynī, *Umda*, 5.76 f. The afternoon prayer is variously, and probably vicariously, attributed to models either Jewish (Goldziher, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 5.27 ff.; Rubin, 'Morning and evening', 119, invoking the *minḥab* rite) or Christian (Bell, *Commentary*, 2.169, quoting the Psalms).

³⁷⁵ See Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 163. Watt (*Muhammad at Medina*, 199) attributes the middle prayer to Jewish influence.

³⁷⁶ Q, 2.238; TAB, 359; WAQ, 406, 473, 474; Mittwoch, *Entstehungsgeschichte*, 10 ff.; Goldziher to Nöldeke, 26 June 1896 (Simon, *Goldziher*, Letter 18, 218). Prayer times in the Qur'ān are mentioned at various points (Q, 2.238, 4.103, 11.114, 20.30, 30.17–18, 52.48–9, 73.2 ff. – see Horowitz, 'Bemerkungen', 249 ff. Bell (*Commentary*, 2.72 f.) detected interpolated passages modifying the number of daily prayers from two to three, dated probably to the early Medinan period. Later Muslim traditions had Muḥammad negotiate with God, with the mediation of Moses, about the number of daily prayers, eventually managing to reduce the fifty daily prayers initially prescribed by God to five (al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.133 f., 5.68 f.; al-Qazqī, *Bayt al-Maqdis*, no. 10).

³⁷⁷ Böwering ('Prayer', *EQ*, 4.227) notes that there is no evidence in the Qur'ān for five daily prayers.

³⁷⁸ Cf. Becker, 'Muslim worship', 50 ff. Howard ('Aspects', 45) surmises the existence of analogous pre-Muḥammadan Arab practice.

³⁷⁹ Mittwoch, *Entstehungsgeschichte*, 9.

³⁸⁰ WAQ, 712, 999. On devotional mitigations, Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, 373 f.

³⁸¹ Bell, *Commentary*, 2.447, 470; 'Vigil', *EQ*. ³⁸² Sayf b. 'Umar, *al-Jamal*, § 159.

Meccan oaths may have been the basic form of Qur'ānic or para-Qur'ānic utterance involved in earlier prayer practices. One could cite as a case in point the oath by *al-duḥā*, a time of day which may well have been the prayer time during which this oath was originally exclaimed. The same might be said for other oaths, invoking other cultic auxiliaries.

Regularity of cultic rhythm was increasingly associated with the regularity of locations for prayer, a matter which clearly had some connection with control over space and the constitution of regular sacred spaces. Early Meccan followers of Muḥammad prayed wherever convenient in the ravines of settlement,³⁸³ and God decreed that, as of AH 5, the faithful could pray anywhere they might find themselves at the appointed time, and could use sand rather than water for their ablutions.³⁸⁴ This implies that the crucial element at this stage was the cycle of sacred time with the want of stable formal locations, but also implies both provisions for prayer during military campaigns and the extension of the new faith to transhumant populations. In AH 10 the Prophet, supported by divine sanction (Q, 10.87), still needed to emphasise to newcomers that crucial to the performance of prayer was correct timing, while simultaneously specifying other parts of the Paleo-Muslim package, the precise proportions of dues expected from the yields of land and livestock.³⁸⁵

In the course of the earliest Medinan years, then, a growing institutionalisation of *ṣalāt* seems already to have been in evidence,³⁸⁶ with the regulation of fixed times and attempts to fix ritual procedure. The boundaries of the Meccan sacred enclave were not always entirely clear. Some traditions place the boundaries, in one direction, at the hill of al-Ḥazwara (incorporated into the sacred enclave when this was widened) and at the other at al-Mas'ā, the line connecting al-Marwa and al-Ṣafā, but other traditions (going back to Sufyān b. 'Uyayna) hold that no information is retained of older boundaries, and that there may have been no specific markers at all.³⁸⁷ These were areas made at one point exclusive to adherents of the new religion: whereas in AH 9 Abū Bakr was sent to Mecca to lead the pilgrimage of Paleo-Muslims and regulate the pilgrimage of unbelievers, soon thereafter divine commands were issued (Q, 9.1 ff.) barring unbelievers from pilgrimage altogether, allocating the function of pilgrimage provisions to Paleo-Muslims, and banning circumambulation in the nude, except for

³⁸³ *SIH*, 1.229, 238. ³⁸⁴ *WAQ*, 427. ³⁸⁵ *SIH*, 4.179. ³⁸⁶ 'Ṣalāt', *EI*, 8.926.

³⁸⁷ Al-Fākihī, *Makka*, nos. 1179, 1181. Al-Ḥazwara served as Mecca's market and is reported to have housed a mysterious structure (*ṣarḥ*) of Waqī' b. Salama al-Iyādī, reputedly a *kāhīn* to whom are credited a number of wise sayings of a vaguely religious nature: Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 136; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, s.v.

those who entered into an agreement with the Prophet and only until the expiry of this agreement.³⁸⁸

Qibla: ritual space distended

The direction of prayer presents a most vexatious problem for research. The sources, as well as modern scholarship, dwell at length on the initial use of Jerusalem as a *qibla*, until, in Sha'bān of AH 2/January 624, God decreed that this should be replaced by the Meccan Ka'ba, catching the Prophet at noon in mid-prayer unawares, having already performed two prostrations in the direction of Jerusalem, and continuing the rite by performing two in the direction of the Ka'ba.³⁸⁹ This matter is attended by much legendary material, and cannot, in my view, be understood satisfactorily. Whether the earliest *ṣalāt* rites were performed in any specific direction cannot, in the present state of knowledge, be determined with certainty.³⁹⁰

Qur'ānic statements on the matter are allusive rather than specific; the injunction of the faithful to turn their 'houses' (*buyūt*) into *qiblas* (Q, 10.87) and the statement asserting that the face of God is everywhere (Q, 2.115) are confusing, and may offer leave for discretion following the abandonment of pagan cultic rites.³⁹¹ Even with respect to the precise direction of prayer within the Meccan sacred enclave, the Prophet is reported to have prayed inside the Ka'ba and towards it, on his mount, towards the *qibla*, whatever this may have indicated, and when uncertain, as later traditions put it, directed his prayers elsewhere.³⁹² When the delegation from Najrān visited the Prophet in Medina shortly before the Ka'ba was decreed to be the *qibla*, and prayed facing east, this elicited no objection.³⁹³ Reports have it that the Prophet and Abū Bakr after him, and thereafter 'Umar for part of his reign, prayed *ṣaqi' al-bayt*, apart from the House, with 'Umar praying behind the *maqām*,³⁹⁴ and there are some reports about the Hujr having been used as the *qibla*, marked by the Prophet's '*anaza*', adding present to past sanctity, well into Umayyad times.³⁹⁵

The material does not seem to lend itself to a definitive track, and rather conveys the sense of continuous change and latitude,³⁹⁶ but with recurrent indications of Mecca. Overall, it would be safer to conclude that there was no such thing as a 'change' of the *qibla* from Jerusalem to Mecca,

³⁸⁸ *SIH*, 4.139 ff. ³⁸⁹ *TAB*, 363; *AGH*, 24.10. ³⁹⁰ See Bell, *Commentary*, 1.28.

³⁹¹ On the vagueness of Qur'ānic evidence, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 560.

³⁹² Al-'Aynī, *Umda*, 4.129, 136 f., 143. ³⁹³ *SIH*, 2.160. ³⁹⁴ *US*, § 529.

³⁹⁵ Hamdan, *Kanonisierung*, 299. ³⁹⁶ Cf. 'Muḥammad', *El*, 7.368a.

as much as a reaffirmation of the Ka'ba as the unique or perhaps the preferred *qibla*. The common assumption that this 'change' was a reaction to Muḥammad's break with the Medinan Jews would need to be revised with a suppleness that relates this event to the vagaries of Muḥammad's Meccan irredentism.³⁹⁷ The fluidity of this situation is well illustrated by the *qibla* orientation of the earliest mosques during the Umayyad period, some easterly, others westerly. They were not all directed towards Mecca, and this seems not to be entirely accounted for by the inaccuracy of geographical and geodesic knowledge of the time, a knowledge that does not seem to have prevented the astronomical alignment of some mosques in the seventh and eighth centuries to directions associated with the rising and setting of the sun and the fixed stars.³⁹⁸ Al-Walīd himself was concerned with the *qibla* direction of major mosques; this had been taken into account as he had the Prophet's mosque in Medina rebuilt, and as the mosque of 'Amr in al-Fuṣṭāt was realigned in 710–712 on an axis better aligned to the Meccan *qibla*.³⁹⁹ As one might expect, greater accuracy in *qibla* orientation was in evidence as time went by,⁴⁰⁰ doubtless allied with the firmer establishment of the Ka'ba as the sole *qibla*.

Precise directions of prayer notwithstanding, the sacredness of the Meccan *ḥaram* received attention overall, both as to its physical form and as to its location in the expanding religion, and it is here that we witness the beginnings of centralised religious policy on the part of state actors. Apparently starting with the intervention of 'Umar in 17/638 who, following his own *'umra* and a flash-flood which swept away the *maqām*, requisitioned land around the Ka'ba and had a low wall built around it, and a mosque, and renewed some of its structure.⁴⁰¹ Mu'āwīya is reported to have initiated the custom of covering the Ka'ba with precious cloth, and to have allocated slaves for its upkeep and maintenance.⁴⁰² Its perimeter was extended to include the Ḥujr by Ibn al-Zubayr in 65/684–5, and two access doors to

³⁹⁷ Wellhausen ('Mohammedanism', 553) regards it as a concession to the old religion, a point that has already been discussed. That the change of *qibla* came as late as Umayyad times (Donner, *Muhammad*, 214) is unlikely.

³⁹⁸ King, 'Alignments', 304: some mosques in Egypt and Spain face the rising sun at midwinter, while some, in Iran, Iraq and Transoxania, face the setting sun at midwinter; others use directions perpendicular to the solstitial, cardinal orientations, or the orientation of urban structures, while, on occasion, mosques were built on the sites of churches and pagan temples without modification of orientation (as in the Umayyad mosque of Damascus, with its *mīhrāb* built into a wall of the existing *temenos* of St John's cathedral).

³⁹⁹ Flood, *Great Mosque*, 189.

⁴⁰⁰ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 561 ff., 568 f. The eastern orientation is often attributed to Christian influence: for instance, Bashear, '*Qibla*', 282; Sharon, 'Umayyads', 129.

⁴⁰¹ TAB, 690; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.149; Creswell, *Architecture*, 27. ⁴⁰² Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.238.

the Ka'ba were built, one for entry and the other for exit, the structure having been rebuilt on the basis of older foundations.

This transformation was reversed by al-Ḥajjāj after his Meccan triumph over Ibn al-Zubayr in October 692. He removed the Ḥujr from the perimeter for reasons unknown,⁴⁰³ but clearly related to the as yet unsettled delimitation of consecrated space. In addition, the Umayyad rebuilding restricted entry to the inside of the Ka'ba, and forbade touching the northern angle of the structure.⁴⁰⁴ 'Abd al-Malik and his son al-Walīd (r. 705–715) also built a covered area, probably a portico with a wooden ceiling and gilt capitals, possibly also with mosaics and crenellations. Al-Walīd gave the mosque in Mecca a definite architectural form for the first time, following pilgrimages in 710 and 714.⁴⁰⁵ But, most significantly, the removal of one stone from the Ka'ba's corners and forbidding touching the northern corner would lend credibility to the view that matters had been in flux, and that what we know today as the Black Stone was stabilising its status as the most venerated cult object overall.⁴⁰⁶

The imperialisation of cultic space

Al-Walīd erected structures to commemorate luxuriantly the locations at which the Prophet had prayed.⁴⁰⁷ One Umayyad governor, Khālīd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Qasrī, dug a well outside the sacred precinct, complete with pool and fountain, and tried to persuade worshippers of its salutary waters in preference to the waters of Zamzam.⁴⁰⁸ This anecdote is all that remains of the traces of what must have been an initiative to vary certain elements in the Meccan cultic geography. This much had indeed been suggested a long while ago,⁴⁰⁹ and could well reflect greater variability and greater state intervention during the first Hijra century than is usually assumed; successive Umayyad Caliphs seemed uncertain about the proper procedure of pilgrimage.⁴¹⁰ Of course, one would expect the Umayyads to have been more solicitous of what was, after all, supposed to be the cultic centre of what was now becoming an imperial religion. But quite apart from problems they had with the Ḥijāz, the Umayyads now had other

⁴⁰³ TAB, 1117 f., 1192; al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 201 ff.

⁴⁰⁴ Creswell, *Architecture*, 62 ff., 653 f.; Gaudfrey-Demombynes, *Pèlerinage*, 38 f.

⁴⁰⁵ Flood, *Great Mosque*, 188. ⁴⁰⁶ Creswell, *Architecture*, I, 1 n. 3 (after Lammens).

⁴⁰⁷ Flood, 'Light in stone', 317 ff.

⁴⁰⁸ TAB, 1287; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.293 f.; al-Azraqī, *Makka*, 339 f.; *SH*, 1.49; Grabar, 'al-Azraqī', 5.

⁴⁰⁹ Gaudfrey-Demombynes, *Pèlerinage*, 98 n. 3, suggesting that Marwān b. al-Ḥakam (r. 684–685) may have wished to give precedence to *sa'ī* over *ṭawāf*.

⁴¹⁰ TAB, 1347, 1367, 1638; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.298.

regional interests, as Arabia was receding from an overall imperial horizon, henceforth centred upon the Syrian lands of Late Antiquity.

The war with Ibn al-Zubayr, Caliph or anti-Caliph according to one's point of view, condensed these new interests attendant upon the new imperial location, and expressed itself in other cultic centres. But it must be remembered that the orientation of the al-Aqṣā mosque in Jerusalem, from humble beginnings recorded by the Frankish Bishop Arculf around 670⁴¹¹ to the more elaborate structure that developed by the time of al-Walīd, was towards the Meccan *qibla*. It appears that the building was deliberately constructed on the Ḥaram platform south of the Rock, against advice to 'Umar attributed, probably apocryphally, to the Jewish convert Ka'b al-Aḥbār, that he should pray from the north of the Rock, aligning the two *qiblas*.⁴¹²

It has long been maintained that al-Ḥaram al-Shārīf at Jerusalem, or the city as a whole in a vaguer way, was reclaimed by the Umayyads as a central cultic location to rival Mecca in the course of the war with Ibn al-Zubayr, and that there was an attempt to divert pilgrimage to Jerusalem as Ibn al-Zubayr was in control of Mecca.⁴¹³ It has also been maintained, for no compelling reason, that Mecca won over Jerusalem as the single focal point of cult only with the translation of the seat of the Caliphate to Iraq.⁴¹⁴ The report on which these positions are based stems from al-Ya'qūbī, and may well have been motivated by anti-Umayyad polemic.⁴¹⁵ But it is not inherently implausible or entirely incredible in so far as it may indicate one possible direction of cultic development among others that had not yet been entirely settled to the satisfaction of the state.⁴¹⁶ For clearly, something was astir in Jerusalem in Umayyad times.⁴¹⁷ The Abbasids removed holy items and symbols of state from the Rock and placed them in the Ka'ba,⁴¹⁸ and the Dome of the Rock does have an ambulatory, and a black slab within, although this latter is likely to be of Abbasid vintage.⁴¹⁹

Clearly, despite the many obscurities and uncertainties in the history of Jerusalem in the early years after its conquest in 636 or 638,⁴²⁰ its religious significance in Syria, reaffirmed not long before by Heraclius (r. 610–641),

⁴¹¹ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 221, 221 n. 18. ⁴¹² Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 49 f., 120 ff.

⁴¹³ Wellhausen, *Arab Kingdom*, 214 f.; Schrieke, 'Himmelreise', 13; more recently and elaborately, Elad, 'Abd al-Malik?', *passim*. See Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, III, III n. 124.

⁴¹⁴ Robinson, *Abd al-Malik*, 100.

⁴¹⁵ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārikh*, 2.261; Cf. Peters, *Distant Shrine*, 61 ff. On aspects of the transmission of al-Ya'qūbī's report, see Horowitz, 'Biographies' (1928), 35 f.

⁴¹⁶ Cf. Bashear, 'Qur'ān 2:114', 237. ⁴¹⁷ Peters, *Distant Shrine*, 63.

⁴¹⁸ Bashear, 'Qur'ān 2:114', 238.

⁴¹⁹ Cf. Elad, *Jerusalem*, 78, 80; Kaplony, *Haram*, 8041; Mekeel-Matteson, 'Meaning', 172.

⁴²⁰ Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 44 f.

made it attractive as the Umayyads were reclaiming ancient locations of cult for their new religion,⁴²¹ without this attractiveness being interpreted as exclusive fascination. The city of 'Īliyā' (Hadrian's Aelia Capitolina), as Jerusalem was then known in Arabic writings,⁴²² clearly acquired an additional importance in light of the Biblicalisation of Qur'ānic materials that was proceeding at the time, and this is reflected in a variety of reports that, real or apocryphal, reflect the situation. There are various reports about 'Umar's receipt of the city's capitulation, and of some clearing and restoration activity he ordered in the area of the Ḥaram,⁴²³ which seems to have been a jumble of refuse and architectural debris surrounding the Rock, but with some evidence of earlier clearing.⁴²⁴ There are also reports about 'Umar and others entering the precinct in a state of *iḥrām*.⁴²⁵

The Umayyads seem to have had a special affection for the site and for Jerusalem and Palestine in general, which may well reflect long acquaintance. Mu'āwiya is reported to have prayed at Golgotha and Gethsemane and to have been 'crowned' in Jerusalem (but having refused to wear the crown); 'Abd al-Malik may have acceded to power while there in 685. Hishām is reported to have sacrificed camels there in 726, and Sulaymān (who ruled from his palace at Ramla in Palestine, and there tried to emulate Damascus and to re-enact its architectural elements)⁴²⁶ is said to have wished to make it the Umayyad capital and to have placed his treasury there. Some Umayyad *qiblas* are reported to have been aligned towards it.⁴²⁷ Overall, Palestine seems to have been the location of many Umayyad rituals of royalty.⁴²⁸

It is unclear how much credence can be given to many elements in these reports, or indeed to reports that, once built, the Dome of the Rock had been circumambulated regularly.⁴²⁹ That Mu'āwiya was given the *bay'a* there may not have had special significance, and may have been the result of circumstance. Umayyad Caliphs (and others) received allegiance not in

⁴²¹ See in general, Busse, 'Islam', 114 ff., with a list, geographically arranged, at 137 ff.

⁴²² The names al-Quds and Bayt al-Maqdis do not occur in al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Sa'd, and other works up to the ninth century. See 'al-Kuds', *EI*, 5.323a, and van Ess, 'Abd al-Malik', 89.

⁴²³ TAB, 659 f.; Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 471, 476. ⁴²⁴ Grabar, *Dome of the Rock*, 30 ff.

⁴²⁵ Al-Qazqī, *Bayt al-Maqdis*, no. 17. It has been suggested that reports of 'Umar's visit to Jerusalem and his acceptance of its surrender in person may be legendary: Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 198 n. 63; de Prémare, *Ta'wīz*, 170 ff. Donner (*Narratives*, 152) rightly confirms the veracity of these reports. For a detailed review of the historiography of this episode, with sceptical conclusions, Busse, 'Omar's image', *passim*.

⁴²⁶ Flood, *Great Mosque*, 219 f.

⁴²⁷ Palmer, *Seventh Century*, 30 f., 47; *TG*, 1.65; Schrieke, 'Himmelfahrt', 167; Bashear, 'Qibla', 267 f.; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 136 ff.

⁴²⁸ Marsham, *Rituals*, 135 f. ⁴²⁹ Grabar, *Dome of the Rock*, 74.

especially designated places but wherever they happened to be at the time of accession, and, until the relative stabilisation of Damascus as the imperial capital, the Umayyads seem to have been fairly itinerant. The matter hardly admits over-theologisation or a repetition of Jerusalem's profile in Muslim eschatology and salvation history.⁴³⁰ One must remember that the religious buildings, especially the al-Aqṣā mosque, were free-standing with respect to the rest of the city, without reference, topographic or otherwise, to the Byzantine and other buildings about,⁴³¹ constituting thereby the beginnings of an independent development without symbolic imbrication with the history of pre-Islamic Jerusalem, and in terms of the construction of a specific and independent Muḥammadan genealogy. This was the time when the myth of the Apostle's Ascension was commencing its development, with Jerusalem as the location related to Q, 17.1.

Be that as it may, what does merit emphasis is that Jerusalem and the building by 'Abd al-Malik of the Dome of the Rock were the visible emblem of the entry by the Umayyads and their religion into the imperial order of Late Antiquity.⁴³² Architectural remains and circumstantial evidence suggest that the site had already seen a triumphalist resacralisation by Heraclius.⁴³³ One can agree with the view that the Dome of the Rock, constructed in 72/691–2, belongs to that relatively rare category of monuments that seem more important for what they are than for what happens in them,⁴³⁴ with architecture used as a mode of political projection.⁴³⁵ The building of circular or polygonal, vaulted and usually domed structures has a long history, going back to Roman mausolea and pagan sanctuaries. Commemoration – of an individual, an event, a divinity – was commonly the purpose of such structures.⁴³⁶ The Dome of the Rock itself seems

⁴³⁰ As, for instance, in Elad, *Jerusalem*, 149 ff., 160 f. For Muslim myths involving the Ḥaram and Jerusalem more generally, see Kaplony, *Haram*, 1085 ff., 1101. Milstein ('Evolution', 45 f.) sketches the way in which the Muslim images of Jerusalem and of Mecca interlaced, even, with time, identified in many respects typologically. See Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, 542 ff.

⁴³¹ Kaplony, *Haram*, 1066–7.

⁴³² For the history of the Ḥaram under the Umayyads and thereafter, see Kaplony, *Haram*, 1012.

⁴³³ Peters, *Distant Shrine*, 56. Grabar (*Shape of the Holy*, 42) concedes that interpretations of the Golden Gate to the Ḥaram as a triumphal arch for Heraclius do make sense, yet he leans to the idea that traces of work on this structure are more likely to indicate Umayyad vintage.

⁴³⁴ Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 106. ⁴³⁵ Cf. Flood, *Great Mosque*, 229.

⁴³⁶ Grabar, *Dome of the Rock*, 98 f., 107 ff., giving as examples what are now the Santa Constanza church in Rome, the Church of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives, the Tomb of the Virgin or of the Theotokos near Nablus, the sixth-century cathedral in Buṣra, and San Vitale in Ravenna. It has been suggested (Khouri, 'Dome of the Rock', *passim*), not implausibly, that the Dome may well have formed part of an old Arab imaginary of the *mīhrāb* and of power monuments, but it was the architectural and iconographic means available to the Umayyads that made its translation into concrete form possible. Milstein ('Evolution', 24 f.) argues for Judaising antecedents of the Dome's structure and function.

to belong to a type of martyrium that existed in Palestine, including the Ascension Church in Jerusalem and the Marian church of Kathisma, on the road to Bethlehem, which also had a double ambulatory and a rock in the middle, upon which the Virgin is reported to have rested.⁴³⁷ The Dome's sheer magnificence, its distinctiveness among octagonal buildings of the same type, not least due to its dome and its 'transfiguration' by mosaics, and its imposing visibility from the city and its approaches,⁴³⁸ are, as imperial statements in a monumentalist medium, in themselves a sufficient *raison d'être* for such a building.

Imperial splendour, built upon the traces of earlier attempts, at the very symbolic religious centre of the erstwhile masters of Syria, with a long inscription which has generally been taken to have been directed at Christianity,⁴³⁹ decorated in usual late antique style,⁴⁴⁰ was an appropriate declamation of entry into the oecumenical imperial order of Late Antiquity. The Dome of the Rock clearly belongs to those monuments that are built in order to be seen.⁴⁴¹ But it gave the location another inflection altogether, that of an emergent salvation history, not particularly Christian but more amply Biblicising, dedicated equally to the commemoration of Muḥammad's relics and traces.⁴⁴²

It is not only that this monument held the imprint of Muḥammad's foot. A black onyx disc with a 20.7 cm diameter set below the rock holding the imprint of his foot (itself later set into a two-dimensional *mihṛāb*) was another monument to Muḥammad, associating him with an altogether different order, one that evokes him with reference to the Ka'ba, and comparable other markers of Muḥammadan presence in Medina and elsewhere in the empire, all likely to have been executed at the command of al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik, part of his systematic programme of commemorating the Prophet.⁴⁴³ Quite apart from possible associations with the footprints of Jesus at the Church of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives, or from evocations of the apocalypse of Baruch regarding a heavenly Jerusalem,⁴⁴⁴ we have here a metonym of the Meccan *qibla*, to the axis of which the

⁴³⁷ Avner, 'Dome of the Rock', 36 ff., with 31 ff. for a criticism of previous scholarship.

⁴³⁸ Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 71 ff., 104 ff., 109.

⁴³⁹ This common view has been questioned recently, with good reason, by Flood, 'Faith', 248.

⁴⁴⁰ Grabar, *Dome of the Rock*, 77 ff. ⁴⁴¹ Grabar, *Dome of the Rock*, 100 ff.

⁴⁴² Cf. Peters, *Distant Shrine*, 56.

⁴⁴³ Flood, 'Light in stone', 315, 326 ff., 356 f. (local Christian and Jewish analogues: 323 ff.); Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 37. The *mihṛāb*, supposedly the earliest one extant (Creswell, *Architecture*, 100), has been shown, perhaps conclusively, to date from the second half of the ninth century (Baer, 'Mihṛab', *passim*).

⁴⁴⁴ Schrieke, 'Himmelreise', 167 f.

niches (sg. *miḥrāb*) of a number of mosques (in Fuṣṭāṭ and Medina) during this period were aligned.⁴⁴⁵

We also have here evidence of an emergent cult of Muḥammad's person,⁴⁴⁶ as in Medina and Mecca, cultivated by the Umayyads. The earliest epigraphic attestation of the notion of a Muḥammadan *sunna* date from 66/685;⁴⁴⁷ epigraphic and numismatic evidence of his name dates from the era of 'Abd al-Malik although Arabian epigraphy needed to wait until 121/738–9, but some undated material could be earlier.⁴⁴⁸ The emergence of the legend of Muḥammad's Ascension (*mi'rāj*) could thus have the construction of the Dome of the Rock around Muḥammad's footprint as he ascended to heaven as a *terminus ad quem*,⁴⁴⁹ although it must be noted equally that the footprint may well have been regarded at some point by some as that of God himself. There are indications of 'Abd al-Malik's anthropomorphism,⁴⁵⁰ which cannot be seen as altogether exceptional or peculiar at that point in time and before the elaboration of Muslim theology with an apophatic inflection. Such would not have been out of keeping with the fact that the Dome of the Rock has an ambulatory, as indicated. Nor would it be out of keeping with Muḥammad's own interviews with God, nor with the locations of God's foot-stool.

While the Dome of the Rock was not per se a location of regular cultic practice but rather a locus of commemoration and of the construction of a cultic personality as well as a point of imperial projection, locations of cultic worship were set up and, later, deliberately constructed throughout the Paleo-Islamic period. It has been noted recently that the Umayyad mosque at Damascus, the Dome of the Rock and the Prophet's mosque at Medina⁴⁵¹ were the largest buildings in Eurasia west of China during this period.⁴⁵² These buildings represented the top end of sacred space, betokening an ambition at once imperial and religious.⁴⁵³ This building programme was calqued, and sometimes initiated, by the increasing monumentality of buildings initiated by Umayyad governors of Iraq, mainly complexes of mosque, residence and treasury,⁴⁵⁴ spatially combining political functions and command over worship, regularising the patterns and

⁴⁴⁵ Flood, *Great Mosque*, 189, 209.

⁴⁴⁶ On the deliberate and systematic reclamation of Muḥammad from the time of 'Abd al-Malik, to which we shall return, see most recently Donner, *Muhammad*, 203 ff., who integrates this material with his thesis that this was the point at which Islam disengaged itself from an erstwhile monotheistic œcumenism of non-denominational character. For the early image of Muḥammad, see *TG*, 1.29 ff.

⁴⁴⁷ Donner, *Narratives*, 88. ⁴⁴⁸ Imbert, 'Islam des pierres', 74, 74 n. 28.

⁴⁴⁹ Busse, 'Jerusalem', 36. ⁴⁵⁰ Van Ess, 'Abd al-Malik', 92 f., 98. ⁴⁵¹ TAB, 1285.

⁴⁵² Wickham, *Inheritance*, 292. ⁴⁵³ Flood, *Great Mosque*, 210 f., 216. ⁴⁵⁴ Morony, *Iraq*, 73 ff.

rhythms of the Paleo-Muslim cultic association. This spatial correlation of functions of political and religious command is probably also in evidence in Jerusalem,⁴⁵⁵ and certainly in Damascus.

At the other end of the scale were mosques that had started to spread throughout the empire, in line with the spread and elaboration of cultic worship, led first, in the older Arabian way, by the nobility now become Umayyad Caliphs and their governors, or by tribal leaders at the tribal mosques such as those of al-Kūfa and Baṣra, which preserved the flavour of social worship of older times and older cultic associations, following the prototypes of cultic associations and of tribal churches that had been prevalent at al-Ḥira.⁴⁵⁶ These social settings of worship developed with time in terms of an incipient clericalisation;⁴⁵⁷ a greater elaboration of communal prayer involved the development of the sermon, prayer for the ruling sovereign, and other features.⁴⁵⁸

Sketching the architectural and social histories of early mosques is not the purpose of this discussion; there is much research already published, and many lacunae remain. Yet there are two salient points that need to be indicated in this context. The layouts of many Marwānid mosques appear similar, and suggest an earlier template.⁴⁵⁹ The combination of functions, political and religious, ethnographically crucial to the Arabs, is reflected in the ultimate paradigm which was the Apostle's mosque in Medina, the courtyard of his residence acting as a focal point for communal activity, including worship.⁴⁶⁰ The development towards the standard hypostyle mosque, with additional antecedents in a variety of other monumental forms,⁴⁶¹ conjugates form with function, with architectural reference to both politics and worship.

The last function is indicated by the development of the *minbar* together with the *miḥrāb*, in the direction of the *qibla*, ultimately of the Ka'ba, serving, as suggested, as a metonymic representation of the last Prophet. The use of the *minbar*, the sign of present authority, from which sermons and orations were delivered, seems to have been made general first by Mu'āwiya, who is also reported to have brought one of Syrian manufacture to the area of the Ka'ba, and caused others to be used as well.⁴⁶² The *miḥrāb*

⁴⁵⁵ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 561 ff. ⁴⁵⁶ On this, Morony, *Iraq*, 221.

⁴⁵⁷ This process is described by Becker, 'Muslim worship', 70 ff. – 'clericalisation' at 72 f.

⁴⁵⁸ Becker, 'Muslim worship', 53, 58 ff., who connects these developments with the Christian mass.

⁴⁵⁹ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 549 n. 21.

⁴⁶⁰ Behrens, *Prophetenmoschee*, 66 ff., 72 ff. The author discusses the site's development under the Medinan Caliphs and Umayyads at 83 ff.

⁴⁶¹ Behrens (*Prophetenmoschee*, 80 ff.) cites basilicas, fora and the synagogue at Doura.

⁴⁶² Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.222 f.

had been associated with pagan worship and with temples overall, in the Qur'an as well as in south Arabia.⁴⁶³ It has also been suggested that the term may have suggested rows of pillars or columns upon a plinth.⁴⁶⁴ The row of pillars would suggest the Prophet's early mosque at Medina,⁴⁶⁵ while the plinth suggests the Prophet's action, and its wider context, of placing a stone at the position of the *qibla*.⁴⁶⁶ It also suggests an association with the point at which the Apostle stuck his staff, indicating at once the emblem of his authority and the direction of prayer.⁴⁶⁷

With the architectural canonisation of the *mihrab* under the Umayyads,⁴⁶⁸ the conclusion was reached of the process by which Paleo-Islam identified and garnered the sacred spaces and the sacred centre of the new religion, an *axis mundi* now relayed iconically across the empire. This point of arrival was one which was more or less coeval with the beginnings of Muslim theology, this being understood as the elaboration of faith in a variety of directions, some violently in conflict, within the boundaries of an established religion. This religion, Islam at a point where Paleo-Islam was crystallising along a durable vector, was one that comprised *ahl al-qibla*. Minimally defined by the ritual implied with reference to the Meccan *qibla*, and mustering a number of basic beliefs in monotheism and the historical and charismatic role of the Apostle, it was also defined by the possession of a specific scripture.

Lineaments of imperial religion

It would therefore appear that, to claim that there was no recognisably Muslim cult before the reign of 'Abd al-Malik,⁴⁶⁹ and that this is related to an extremely diffuse and somewhat shapeless polity, has indeed become something of a mantra, and much too dismissive a formulaic model of interpreting Paleo-Islam – the role of 'Abd al-Malik's son al-Walid is not often enough given its due importance in this and other matters. This position is based upon material remains, epigraphic, numismatic and papyrological. Muḥammad himself only 'makes his debut' on two Arab-Sasanian coins

⁴⁶³ Horovitz, 'Bemerkungen', 260 ff.; Robin, 'Du paganisme', 152 ff.

⁴⁶⁴ Serjeant, 'Mihrāb', *passim*. ⁴⁶⁵ Serjeant, 'Mihrāb', 453.

⁴⁶⁶ WAQ, 1021, at Tabūk. ⁴⁶⁷ Becker, 'Muslim worship', 67.

⁴⁶⁸ Foss ('Syria in transition', 242) argues from archaeological evidence that the first semicircular *mihrāb* is probably that of Buṣra, c. 720. But of course the idea and structure go back, in all probability, to al-Walid, combined with the minbar and the *maqsūra*, the sovereign's private prayer space within the mosque. See Becker, 'Muslim worship', 71 and Horovitz, 'Bemerkungen', 260.

⁴⁶⁹ As well argued by Johns, 'Archaeology', 422 and *passim*, and with a different inflection, Donner, *Muhammad*, 203 ff.

from Bīshāpūr in Fars using the double *shahāda*, the profession of faith at once in God and the Apostolic office of Muḥammad, dated AH 66 and 67 (AD 685–6, 686–7), and issued by the Zubayrid Ibn ‘Āmir.⁴⁷⁰ Before 72/691, the archaeological record is silent on Islam, probably for reasons regarding nomenclature discussed above.⁴⁷¹ There are some indications, from Egypt at least, that some Arabs may have thought their rule might be temporary, and sought an accommodation with the Romans.⁴⁷² Moreover, early Arabic inscriptions do not so much rehearse Qur’ānic pericopes as make appeal to the God of Moses, Aaron, Abraham, Gabriel, Michael, Israfil and Muḥammad, as well as restatements of or references to certain Qur’ānic ideas,⁴⁷³ and it is only with the Marwānid period that we find Qur’ānic quotations beyond the *basmala*.⁴⁷⁴ This is not to say, however, that the period witnessed a ‘Qur’ānisation’ of religio-political discourse.⁴⁷⁵

None of this suggests the inchoate nature of the emergent polity or the uncertain nature of the new religion, the latter being regarded as a process undergoing a cumulative development acquiring a vectorial momentum. If there was no public proclamation of Islam as such,⁴⁷⁶ expressed in the media available (or those that have remained), this needs be taken to imply not indeterminacy, as is sometimes automatically inferred, but rather the lack of a need to declare polity and religion in certain types of material media.⁴⁷⁷ The Qur’ān was approximated in the material evidence, the text being circulated only restrictively and fragmentarily, as we shall see, but nevertheless was rapidly becoming a major component of the Paleo-Muslim ritual habitus. This is all but surprising or indicative of indistinction. Paleo-Islam was still the developing religion of an Arab warrior caste, at least as far as the governed were concerned;⁴⁷⁸ without social and political bearers, religions count for nothing. Cultural and political output of a religious nature was directed inwards, using Arab means of transmission

⁴⁷⁰ Hoyland, ‘Documentary texts’, 397; *Seeing Islam*, 552 f. We find mention of *Mamet apostolos th(eo)u* in a bilingual protocol found at Khirbat al-Mird, dated 705–715: Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri*, no. B.2. Donner (*Muhammad*, 206) suggests that there is evidence of interpolating ‘and His Apostle’ following ‘belief in God’ in *ḥadīth* texts.

⁴⁷¹ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 549 f. ⁴⁷² Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 559.

⁴⁷³ Hoyland, ‘Content and context’, 79 ff., 79 n. 7, 83 ff.

⁴⁷⁴ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 695 ff.: at the Dome of the Rock, the Umayyad mosques at Damascus and Medina and on some milestones. The formula has a complex epigraphic history: Imbert, ‘Islam des pierres’, 70 f.

⁴⁷⁵ As claimed by Donner, ‘Qur’ānicization’, in rather summary and over-interpretative fashion.

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 555.

⁴⁷⁷ This point has also been made, from a somewhat different perspective, by Hoyland, ‘Documentary texts’, 410.

⁴⁷⁸ See the comments of Donner, ‘Military institutions’, 322.

and, crucially, situations of cultic practice and of oratorical delivery, not to speak of the auditory phenomenon of the Qur'ān.

The Umayyads did have a state religion – religion and polity together being still an affair of the Arabs in the process of conquest, settlement and state building. Ultimately, that the situation was far from inchoate is indicated by the fact that early Arabic inscriptions drew upon a common stock of phrases and words, used the new era, employed a homogeneous idiom and used a monumental/administrative script. Phrases occurring in imperial inscriptions appear in graffiti a couple of decades later. All this indicates a fairly homogeneous elite and a decided degree of control from the centre.⁴⁷⁹ One crucial aspect of Paleo-Muslim religious politics was the scripturalisation and canonisation of the Qur'ān, a monument of Paleo-Muslim coherence if ever there was one.

⁴⁷⁹ Hoyland, 'Content and context', 91 f., who adds (at 96) that the development of what is here being called Paleo-Islam cannot be construed from inscriptions, and that the limited stock of specifically Islamic concepts does not necessarily indicate shallow Islamisation. For evidence for state structure and administrative command and control capacities under Mu'āwiya, albeit with certain limits on the exercise of authority, see Foss, 'Mu'āwiya's state'.

CHAPTER 7

Paleo-Islam 2 *The Paleo-Muslim canon*

A constituent element in the cumulative markers of Paleo-Islam, one that is generally seen to signal a crucial Muslim *differentia*, was the establishment of a formal scripture out of Muḥammadan revelations; this was the lasting redaction of inspiration received by the Apostle and transmitted by him to Paleo-Muslims, a vector of Paleo-Islam that ran parallel to the creation and consolidation of the Muḥammadan movement. A novel mark of distinctiveness in the region where Muḥammad's movement emerged was that it rapidly came to characterise itself as scripturalist. Muḥammad was the Apostle of a distinctive and unique deity; he founded a new *dīn* around a new cultic association and its socio-political (and military) correlates, distinguished by tokens of ritual, albeit not, initially, endowed with a definitive name. In tandem with Muḥammad's political, social and organisational leadership was his vatic charisma as expressed in his verbal enunciations conveying the *vox dei*, the record of which was to carry his charisma up to the present day.

Muḥammad's God was recurrently communicative; the Apostle was keen to enunciate communications received from beyond and to endow them with the power to shape actions in a way far more thoroughgoing and systematic than had been customary. But he also produced a corpus of enunciations that were to constitute a verbal koine which distinguished Paleo-Muslims by its words no less than by its status as a scripture: a crucial cultic auxiliary, and, in its durable form, the token of definitive dissociation both from Arab religions and from the two other major durable religions, Christianity and Judaism. Paleo-Islam is inextricably connected with the emergence of its scripture; but one needs to be wary of the abiding prejudice which has it that Books can constitute communities, rather than communities constituting Books.

In his later Meccan period, Muḥammad was enjoined to challenge his adversaries not only by demanding that they show him what their deities had created on their own, but by bringing forth a revealed Book, *kitāb*

(Q, 46.4). Clearly, this represents the point at which the notion of scripture as evidentiary prodigy – later, in theological elaboration, an evidentiary miracle – was being made into a Paleo-Muslim staple. It should be recalled that the Gospels are likewise full of demands to Jesus and his Apostles that they provide Signs in order to carry conviction with their hearers, and the demand for evidentiary prodigies is ubiquitous in the history of religion.

The Qur'ānic text insisted nevertheless that even if the pagans were clearly to witness a revelation, physically inscribed upon parchment, they would still disbelieve and maintain it was nothing but magic (Q, 6.7 – late Meccan), or that it was only fables of the ancients the like of which they could themselves compose. Pagans had insisted instead that Muḥammad's God, like their own deities, signal his presence by sending down manifestations of betylic wrath, like raining stones upon the world (Q, 8.31 – Medinan), as He had indeed done in times past. But He also sent down a primordial Sign, this being revelation, figuring as *al-furqān*, as announced in the opening verse of the *sūra* by this name (Q, 25.1), a token of division from pagans, defeated at Badr – but also from Jews and Christians.¹

A book of divine enunciation

The demand for a Book may seem paradoxical given the circumstances of place. To my mind, the standard construal of the idea of a Book as unproblematic, given the ready example of Jews and Christians, locally and further afield, begs the question rather than answers it. Pagan communication with the unseen had been an ad hoc affair, remembered, perhaps, but rarely recorded. The idea was not unknown to Muḥammad's Hījāzi

¹ This particular connotation, as well as Badr, the battle whose outcome was yet another confirmation of Muḥammad's divinely appointed office (Bell, *Origins*, 101), was well noted as primary by Watt (*Bell's Introduction*, 139 f., 145 ff.), who, albeit concurring with the common view that the term derives from Jewish-Aramaic *purqān* or Syriac *purqānā*, nevertheless prefers a semantic to an etymological consideration of it in terms of the Arabic language rather than as something contrived, thus unlike Donner ('Furqān', 286 ff.), who has reservations about the use of etymologies, yet opts for a complex of Syriac etymologies as an explanation. See Horovitz, 'Proper names', 216 ff.; Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 225 ff. (who also notes the primary Arabic sense of 'separation', almost incidentally, at 228); and, more generally, 'Furkān', *EL*. It seems an unnecessary contrivance likewise to mystify and over-interpret the related term *al-Fārūq*, applied to 'Umar I and others, in light of certain Syriac associations of the term, and to endow it with a mysterious soteriological association, as in Bashear, 'Fārūq', 48 ff., 57. See also de Prémare, *Ta'īs*, 180 ff. As early as 1841, Fleischer ('Über das Arabische', 102, 104, 134), commenting on the meaning attributed to *furqān* with reference to Aramaic, had deemed it unlikely that a language would accept new morphological forms with odd meanings when a perfectly straightforward sense was available already. In short, like many other Arabic words subject to unnecessary conjecture, *furqān* is no more Syriac than the English word 'origin' is Latin.

milieu, but was one that related to Christians and Jews, not pagans. That pagans, too, were now being sent serial communication from the deity, and that this might need to be recorded durably, must be seen as a highly unusual claim making exorbitant demands on credibility. Muḥammad was an *ummī* addressing a people who were equally *ummīyyūn*, unused to scriptures.²

We have already had occasion to appreciate the Prophet's sense for strategic nodes that needed to be broken. We have also seen it at work in the selection of an exotic deity as the sole divinity, and in promoting various forms of ritual drill to signal His demands. Just as the new deity was exotic as well as vaguely familiar, so was the notion of a scripture – note would need to be taken of the unusual relationship of Muḥammad with God if the Bible be considered. There, pronouncements by epigonic prophets were far – in comparison to Qur'ānic canonisation, extremely remote in time – from what eventually became the canonical text. One possible exception is the Book of Ezekiel, where the distance in time between revelation and redaction was sufficiently close to allow attribution to Ezekiel himself,³ roughly comparable to Muḥammad and the Qur'ān. In making the unusual demand that the deity deliver durable communication in the verbal medium, Paleo-Islam produced yet another token of division from paganism, but this was also a token of division from the People of the Book – a token of distinctiveness, and a leitmotif, but not a means of conversion to the new faith,⁴ a conception of the role of scripture which was to come later.

At one stroke were sown the seeds not only of what was to become a novel Arabian religion, but also of a religion that at once divided the emergent community from both paganism and scripturalist religions already in place; it was ultimately to graft upon itself the œcumenical claims of Christianity, first the religious claims, later imperial horizons which could only have been but dimly perceptible to Muḥammad. But clearly, the idea of a Book, however understood, played a central role in the religious imaginary of the seventh century as of Late Antiquity more generally,⁵ a time when, as we have seen, something was astir in Arabia, and when the Muḥammadan notion of *Ahl al-Kitāb*, People of the Book, arose, an idea without precedent.⁶

² *SIH*, § 61. On the term, Bell, *Commentary*, 1.80; Paret, *Kommentar*, 21 f.; 'Ummī', *EQ*.

³ Childs, *Introduction*, 361.

⁴ Cf. the statement of Stroumsa ('Early Christianity', 163) that the Christian scriptures played little role in conversion.

⁵ Stroumsa, 'Early Christianity', 155. ⁶ Stroumsa, 'Early Christianity', 154.

It seems unlikely that we shall ever be able to reconstruct the detailed emergence of a notion of a Book by Muḥammad and his followers that superseded the ad hoc inspiration familiar to him and to his people. But it is generally accepted that a period – of three or so years, according to Muslim traditions – of intense communication with the deity preceded any pronouncements that might be regarded as Qur’ānic,⁷ and that the substance of Muḥammad’s cumulative communications with God – as distinct from the vatic statements of a Warner – were proclaimed only from the late Meccan period. The idea of a durable scriptural legacy emerged cumulatively but rapidly, transforming the Book of Revelation into scripture; but the precise chronology is impossible to reconstruct. All that can be said with any confidence is that the earlier mentions of registers of divine revelation spoke rather indistinctly of Sheets or Tablets (*ṣuḥuf*) sent to Abraham and Moses (Q, 20.133; 53.36; 87.17, 19), followed by generic references to a Book (Q, 50.4, 52.2, 65.78), in turn followed by the Book sent down to Moses (Q, 25.35, 28.45, 29.27, 40.53, 46.12). Throughout, it would be advisable to think of the materiality of these texts, rather than to conceive them as entirely metaphorical.

Thereafter, the text of the Qur’ān came to refer to a Book sent to Muḥammad (Q, 47.2 and *passim*). References to the Torah (*Tawrāt*), the Gospels (*Injīl*) and the Psalms (*Zabūr*) appear mainly in Medinan revelations. To the Book was attributed early on the same status as these, and this is a more apt perspective for study than one which might seek out specific content beyond the fact of an inspired Book.⁸ This movement to increasing awareness, textual self-reflexivity and cumulative self-reference in Muḥammad’s proclamations describes fairly an evolution by which the Qur’ān was constituted, and gains additional sustenance if one bears in mind that the earliest revelations displayed no tangible concern with self-authorisation and no traces of consistent self-referentiality,⁹ while later the Book was to put forth powerful arguments for its own canonical status allied to a partial disqualification of earlier scriptures.¹⁰ Revelations had been still in the jinnic mode of vatic enunciation characteristic of a seer and a Warner (Q, 6.92) and indeed of the Prophet, not yet those of the Apostle who was later to be.

⁷ On this *fatra*, or interregnum, see ‘Muḥammad’, *EI*, 7.363a.

⁸ Boisliveau, ‘Canonisation’, § 19.

⁹ Sinai, ‘Self-referentiality’, 108. Qur’ānic verses describing the Qur’ān are conveniently assembled, in translation with some commentary, in Nagel, *Koran*, Anhang vi. For the names by which the Qur’ān refers to itself, see ‘Names of the Qur’ān’, *EQ*.

¹⁰ Boisliveau, ‘Canonisation’, §§ 20, 27, 29.

If, in view of chronological uncertainties, we are unable to discern the precise details of this development apart from saying that a register of Muḥammad's revelations, once deliberately identified as such, followed references to other scriptures and to a generic notion of a Book, it is nevertheless possible to indicate a feature that underlies all these separate references. In order to begin to discern what may have been meant by a Book, one needs to refer to what is known or what might be inferred about precisely what a Book may have meant to Muḥammad and his audience, and to consider how what ultimately became the Qur'ān, in its redacted canonical aspect of *muṣḥaf*, may have been composed – it is well to note right away that *muṣḥaf* has a generic sense and is not confined to the written canon of the Qur'ān,¹¹ and that the Qur'ān figures as both a proper name, designating an object, and a verbal noun, designating its performance, the two not always easy semantically to disentangle.¹²

It has been suggested that, before its conception as scripture, the Qur'ān consisted of individual enunciations termed *āyāt* (sg.: *āya*), Signs.¹³ These are the atoms of the Qur'ānic text, its elementary constitutive units; for analytical purposes, any consideration of Qur'ānic composition must start with them. As we saw above, there is mention of a durable register on parchment, and, even in the early Meccan period, of committing to writing matters dictated, ancient fables in the case of pagan polemics (Q, 25.5).¹⁴ The likelihood is that, in the early period, the idea of a Book had betokened not yet the expectation of a unified, serial register, but, at most, a process of occasional collection, enunciation and reiteration. Concrete indications of deliberate redaction before the Hijra are lacking,¹⁵ but should not be excluded. Written or unwritten, Muḥammad regarded revelation as God's, and there is no evidence that the written or unwritten character of this revelation compromised its divine origin.¹⁶ On the understanding that the Book, *kitāb*, is perceived in its straightforward sense as any text physically inscribed on some material,¹⁷ the Qur'ān as written text grew gradually out of the enunciations delivered by Muḥammad, the redacted Qur'ān following an early period of which only sign-passages have survived.¹⁸ Recent

¹¹ For instance, WAQ, 680, with reference to Torah texts acquired as booty.

¹² Cf. Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 480 n. 63. ¹³ Graham, 'Qur'ān', 362.

¹⁴ For Qur'ānic references to writing materials and instruments (*raqq*, *qirṭās*, *qalam*, *lawḥ*, *kitāb*, *khātām*, *asfār*, *ṣuḥuf*, *sijill*, *madād*), see Abbott, *North Arabic Script*, 52, and 'Instruments', *EQ*, 2.544 f.

¹⁵ Cf. Crapon, *Coran*, 158 f. ¹⁶ Madigan, *Self-image*, 22.

¹⁷ This basic sense is very old, and existed already in a Dadanitic inscription: Maraqtan, 'Writing materials', 307.

¹⁸ Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 137 f., 141 f.

research into the earliest Qur'ānic parchments, including carbon dating, technical undecidables notwithstanding, reveal evidence of very early redaction, not later than fifteen years following the Apostle's death, with possible indications of Muḥammadan prototypes closer to what became the 'Uthmānic Vulgate than some other Companion codices, on the evidence of the sequence of verses and sentences. I must say that the inference of a prophetic prototype would not account adequately for the indications that we have on the process of composition, and is an unnecessary assumption.¹⁹ Likewise, it would be advisable to resist the rather mechanical mode of conceiving Qur'ānic redaction as gradual and more or less smooth: the likelihood is that it was redacted on various occasions, and that this would have involved Muḥammadan iterations, but also Muḥammadan reiterations in various forms, as well as the reiterations and repetitions of others.²⁰

References to writing, and what was ultimately to designate the durable transmission in the form of a *kitāb/muṣḥaf*, can be highly metaphorical, betokening more the divine origin of an enunciation than its inscription or its otherwise variable physical form of retention and circulation. This had been the case for many centuries in the Near East, with the handing down of Tablets by a deity, as books or scrolls to an Apostle or, in the case of Muḥammad, of oral communication,²¹ whatever its nature. But it is clear that the idea of a heavenly archetype for the Qur'ān belongs to a later stage of Qur'ānic composition,²² in all likelihood posterior to initial redactions. That the enunciations sent down by God might be seen (over and above their use as Signs or tokens of divine presence and writ (*āya*)) as the divine *logos*²³ is dependent on the subsequent development of a theological and mythical discourse. Similarly, Qur'ānic enunciations are tangible manifestations of eternal Tablets preserved by God; precisely how this mytheme will have been understood by Muḥammad, beyond a vague association with eternity and transcendence, we have no way of telling. Considering God's Word as a divine attribute in a technical sense, however, is dependent upon later theological elaborations, in the same way as the full elaboration of discourses on the Tablet is dependent upon later mythological developments.²⁴

¹⁹ The point is made more elaborately in Sadeghi and Goudarzi, 'Ṣan'ā' 1', 22.

²⁰ Reiteration, a most important element in the making of Qur'ānic composition, is noted by Neuwirth (*Koran*, 383) as 'Wiedererzählung', albeit somewhat in passing and only in the context of Medinan interpolations and expansions.

²¹ Madigan, *Self-image*, 7, 107 ff., 123; Widengren, 'Holy book', 215 ff.; Jeffery, *Qur'ān as Scripture*, 9 ff.

²² Bell, *Origins*, 93. ²³ Madigan, *Self-image*, 184 f.

²⁴ Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 233 f.; Pretzl, *Attributenlehre*, 26 f.

In its primary form, therefore, the Qur'ān as enunciated by Muḥammad was a continuing account, immediate as well as reiterative, of Muḥammad's communications from the divine, which might or might not be inscribed in a durable register, be this register live memory, a physical deposit on some writing material or a heavenly archetype. It related to existing divine revelations by substitution: a substitution later to be redacted in terms of the idea that for every epoch there was a specific Book, God being free to affirm, abrogate or efface what He wishes. All the while, He preserves for Himself an archetypal Book called *umm al-kitāb*, mythically associated with a Tablet (Q, 2.383, 13.38 f.),²⁵ challenging those who doubt its authenticity and who presume to claim that they can bring forth the like of it, or that they are themselves in receipt of revelation (Q, 2.79, 6.92 f.).

The discussion to follow will consequently concentrate primarily on the performative rather than the later, formally constituted features of the Qur'ān, more on its *Sitz im Leben* than on its conceptual elaboration.²⁶ One would, after all, agree with the statement that Qur'ān and *kitāb* are proximate concepts, whose conjunction underscores live oral delivery.²⁷ In both cases, it is this enunciative entity that is crucial. But *kitāb* and Qur'ān did become roughly synonymous, and did eventually get canonised as a scripture. It is to this matter that we now turn.

Forms of enunciation

In concrete terms, whatever its theological or mythological associations, the Qur'ān was associated with certain styles of live delivery, likely to have been familiar forms of intonation and stylised recitation, and, for longer enunciations, of cantillation. The Qur'ānic imperative 'read!' (*iqra'*) delivered to Muḥammad had no connection with reading but was a command to proclaim.²⁸ Such proclamation betokened an uncanny and authoritative presence at the origin of, or associated with, the phatic enunciation thus delivered. It was also an immediate communicative act, and one should assume that it was delivered in tonal colours appropriate to

²⁵ Cf. 'Book', *EQ. Umm al-kitāb*, it must be remembered, is a term which came to have another, distinct semantic field, connected with the division of the Qur'ān overall into specific sections: al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.177 ff.

²⁶ Cf. the remarks of Neuwirth, *Komposition*, 24 ff., on the pre-canonical Qur'ān as an instrument in community building and liturgy.

²⁷ Madigan, *Self-image*, 137.

²⁸ Cf. Hirschfeld, *Researches*, 19. That this sense was not uncommon among the Arabs is betokened by the use of the verb *qr'* in a Nabataean inscription in the Negev, and more broadly as well: Macdonald, 'Literacy', 94, 94 n. 156.

the communicative setting, conveying, in the Meccan period, a series of moods, expectations, invocations, fears and hopes – delivering a ‘sacramental effectivity’²⁹ in statements that were only with time, and only with later semantic refocusing in the context of early disputes with the Meccans, to become what are known as Qur’ānic teachings.³⁰ The crucial element was the very fact of the Qur’ān, recently characterised most aptly as ‘beatific audition’.³¹

Clearly, such a form of delivery was known to Christians and Jews,³² and much is made of this in scholarship. Nevertheless, one would assume that pagan Arabs did stylise the delivery of their *talbiya*, their *saj’* pronouncements, and their other verbal communications with the unseen or the otherwise uncanny – not to speak of poetry.³³ The Qur’ān itself (Q, 73.4) enjoins forms of verbal modulation (what later became the modes of *tartil*, *tilāwa* and *tajwīd*, although the earliest melodic structures are unclear), and there are indications about its effect on listeners, stereotypically construed as tremulous weeping and prostration³⁴ before this presence of the unseen. This is common to all scriptures in particular settings, in some of which the sounds themselves, properly articulated, were in a special way sacred;³⁵ the materiality of the voice when the Torah is properly recited is sanctified.³⁶ What might be concluded from this is that any tone-deaf consideration of the Qur’ān, as composed, preserved and delivered, would be inadequate.³⁷

²⁹ Sinai, *Fortschreibung*, 39. Cf. in general Graham, *Divine Word*, 110 ff. and Madigan, *Self-image*, 52.

³⁰ Cf., *mutatis mutandis*, Sinai, *Fortschreibung*, 44 ff.

³¹ Hoffmann, *Poetic Qur’ān*, 40. ³² Cf. Madigan, *Self-image*, 120, 193 ff.

³³ See the comment on al-A’shā’s epithet *ṣannājat al-‘Arab* in Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shi’r*, § 434.

³⁴ Ibn Sallām, *Faḍā’il*, 222, 231; ‘Recitation of the Qur’ān’, *EQ*, 368 f., 380. An elaborate system of cantillation developed later (al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.275 ff., 2.335 ff.; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 1.10 ff.). This was not unnaturally connected initially to the rise of the Medinan school of music of Ma’bad in the Paleo-Muslim period (Talbi, ‘Qirā’a’, 184 ff.; Afsaruddin, ‘Excellences’, 10 ff.; *AGH*, 8.230), built upon Persian modes (*AGH*, 3.197), later still in terms of the modal system of *maqāmāt* that emerged in the Abbasid period (‘Recitation of the Qur’ān’, *EQ*, 4.380). For a review of classical treatises, see Elashiry, *Sounds*, 58 ff., and ch. 3, *passim*, and the considerations of articulation, phrasing, tempo and modulation in Nelson, *Art*, 20 ff. In shorter compass, ‘Recitation of the Qur’ān’, *EQ*, 4.373 ff.

³⁵ Sawyer, *Sacred Languages*, 47. ³⁶ Stern, ‘Canonisation’, 232.

³⁷ Cf. the comments on the obsession of scholarship with text without due attention to sound in Nelson, *Art*, 16 f. We are here discussing the term *Qur’ān* as a verbal noun rather than as the proper name that it also became when it was canonised as the *mushaf* (Cf. Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 70, 77, 480 n. 63). This was an original sense denoting phatic delivery, and it was to persist throughout, along with other senses, after the Qur’ān came exegetically and otherwise to be considered as a canonical text (Cf. Madigan, *Self-image*, 52, 56). This is of course a distinction which is paralleled by that between the liturgical Bible and the study Bible: Stern, ‘Canonisation’, 231 f.

Beatific audition

Although well-integrated works on the poetics and rhetoric of the Qur'ān, a growth area in scholarship today, are scarce,³⁸ there are a number of detailed indicators of its elocutionary properties. Eminently relevant to the poetics of Qur'ānic delivery are textures of phonological parallelism and sound-figures, sometimes yielding a certain semantic indeterminacy,³⁹ an indeterminacy dramatically magnified by the occurrence (ten times) of the mystifying phrase *u^a mā adrāk^a* following cryptic utterances on cataclysmic events,⁴⁰ in a manner that induces perplexity, characteristic of prophetic and oracular speech overall. One might also mention certain quantitative regularities between verse groups.⁴¹

There are certain prosodic features of Qur'ānic rhyme which attach to a vast proportion of the text⁴² – cadenced phrases, brief declarations, monorhymes or alternating and grouped rhymes, often working in parallel. Parallelism plays an important part, as do alliteration, antitheses, semantic ambiguities, hyperboles, similes and metaphors, syntactic inversions of the verb/subject position normal in Arabic, and breathless parataxis yielding incantatory effects.⁴³ Qur'ānic oaths, particularly the more elaborate, longer ones which strike a majestic tonality, often work with semantic indeterminacy over and above their rhyme and tonality to yield effect,⁴⁴ and their use of negatives (*lā uqsimu*) for emphasis is especially forceful and effective.⁴⁵ Indeterminacy is also related to the play of synecdoche, and to the transcoding of certain visions of annihilation between different sensory

³⁸ Most recently, Hoffmann, *Poetic Qur'ān*, a perceptive book, well schooled in literary theory. It is yet, as noted correctly in van Gelder's review, marred by 'unforgivable errors', some betraying insufficient mastery of Arabic morphology and syntax. One might add that a better knowledge of Islam would have been helpful. But the book need not be dismissed entirely on account of these serious defects, as it does suggest programmatically some most fruitful lines of investigation.

³⁹ Sells, 'Sound and meaning', *passim*.

⁴⁰ Noted by Torrey, 'Difficult passages', 471, where the author asserts unnecessarily that in seven of these cases reference is made to the Last Judgement.

⁴¹ Neuwirth, 'Horizont', *passim*, although it does seem excessive to infer an overall architectonic principle, as will be clear from a subsequent discussion, or to make claims for the 'symphonic' nature of polymetric *sūras* (Crapon, *Koran*, 486 f.).

⁴² Stewart, 'Saj', *passim*; Zwettler, *Oral Tradition*, 101 f., 118 ff., 156 ff., on distinctiveness with regard to Arabic poetry, *contra* Vollers, *Volkssprache*, 177 ff. Crapon (*Koran*, 305, 306 n. 1219) affirms a connection to poetry arising from a metrics composed of quantity and accentuation, with the accent being understood as intensity of pitch carried by metre.

⁴³ Hoffmann, *Poetic Qur'ān*, 74 ff. (with indication of Biblical rhetorical parallels) and *passim*; Robinson, *Discovering*, 99 ff.

⁴⁴ Smith ('Oaths') presents a complete tally of these oaths, accompanied by basic grammatical analysis. See now the more satisfactory treatment of Neuwirth (*Koran*, 284 ff.).

⁴⁵ See Bell, *Commentary*, 2.427.

orders, visual, auditory and sensible: these are clearly extremely effective pragmatically, and are very well illustrated by the Qur'ānic use of terms such as *ṣayḥa* (the Clamour/Wail), *ṣā'iqā* (the Lightning Blast) and *rajfā* (the Tremor/Convulsion) relating the destruction of peoples of yore,⁴⁶ deployed by Muḥammad the Warner. One might also mention here the proliferation of formulaic statements, often as doublets,⁴⁷ acting, in the context of oral delivery, as confirmation and refrain.

In all, what we have is a text conceived as a record of vatic proclamations, and it is no accident that most systematic analyses of its poetics and rhetoric have depended on the analysis of Meccan *sūras*, which lend themselves more readily to this purpose.⁴⁸ The text displays an 'exquisite sensibility' to vocalic consequences,⁴⁹ and this sensibility is well reflected in assonance, having an acoustic effect comparable to that of rhythm,⁵⁰ quite routinely using grammatical terminations or dropping inflections to achieve assonance, or indeed on occasion straining sense or modifying proper names to the same end – the equivalent of poetic licence. In addition, the use of pauses, *fāṣila* or *waqf*, needs to be factored into the analysis, these performing acoustic functions corresponding to rhyme and assonance. This is one extension of the Qur'ānic text carrying the four fundamental characteristics of sound (duration, intensity, pitch and timbre), in such a way that duration acquires rhythmical functions at the three levels of syllabic isochrony (determined by the number of syllables), qualitative isochrony (a function of the distribution of long vowels and

⁴⁶ These terms and their relations are carefully studied in the semiotic analysis of Toelle, *Coran*, 165. One might mention here the existence of negative oaths in enunciations attributed to Musaylima: Makin, *Representing the Enemy*, 194, which would suggest a well-established Arab practice.

⁴⁷ Dundes, *Fables*, 23 ff., 31 ff. This feature seems to conform to the famous Law of Repetition introduced in the study of folklore (*ibid.*, 53).

⁴⁸ See the comments on the longer verses in Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 61. One of the most systematic and detailed technical studies to date seems to be that of Crapon, *Coran*, which brings out well the acoustic aspects of the text, although it is again based on the analysis of Meccan *sūras* only. I am sceptical about a strophic analysis of the texts in question, no matter how metaphorically 'strophe' may be understood in terms of a sequence of rhythmic units which are not always constant (177 ff. 183, and *passim*). There is no regular strophic structure in Qur'ānic verses (Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 73 – but see Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 69). Neuwirth, *Komposition*, is equally systematic and thorough, again confined to the Meccan *sūras*; unlike a few other contemporary scholars, he doubts that any consistent compositional schemata may be found in the longer Medinan chapters (*Koran*, 330 and 327 ff.). The older work of Bell remains crucially important (Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 69 ff.). I would suggest that it would be reasonable in this regard to combine the study of Qur'ānic poetics and rhetoric with a systematic restatement, in modern language, of the prodigious insights and analyses of Jurjānī, *Asrār*, centred on elocutionary force and the pragmatics of delivery and reception, in line with the Arabic rhetorical tradition. The one scholar who has recently attempted to study Qur'ānic rhetoric in terms of the classical Arabic theory of enunciation is Larcher ('Coran', 456 and 452 ff.).

⁴⁹ Crapon, *Coran*, 308. ⁵⁰ See Crapon, *Coran*, 183; Nelson, *Art*, 8 ff.

syllables) and metrical isochrony.⁵¹ Indeed, though extensive passages of the Qur'ān do not scan qualitatively or accentually, they are cadenced by regular stresses and constant syllabic quantities.⁵² It was around such 'primitive punctuation' of the text that the original oracular pronouncements were made.⁵³

Being a series of phatic enunciations with considerable rhetorical energy and the formal characteristics mentioned as well as many others, the Qur'ān was delivered by Muḥammad and by others in formal and ritual settings, and in other settings as well. The proclamation of Muḥammad's religion, one would presume, was declaimed, among other places, from the *minbar* at his mosque in Medina, just like the poetry of Ḥassān b. Thābit.⁵⁴ It is quite probable that certain portions of it, most notably the *fātiḥa*,⁵⁵ display certain formal concordances of a generic nature with, it has been suggested, John Chrysostom's liturgy, the Lord's Prayer, and a Babylonian hymn to Sin.⁵⁶ Others (such as Q, 59.22–4) may be hymns of praise to Allāh, suggesting other hymns.⁵⁷ Certain portions of the Qur'ān, it has been maintained, have formal, affective and other affinities with the Psalms, as traces and echoes, and even as 'intertextual conversations' extending over long sections of text.⁵⁸ Whatever consequences might be drawn from such cross-references, these may belong together to an ubiquitous *Rede-Typus* or discursive type, without this betokening direct borrowing, and conveying more a common liturgical language available regionally.⁵⁹ In any case, Qur'ānic passages using the normal 'thou' form of address to God generally used in prayer are rare. Clearly, this is all a far cry from the common presumption of the existence of some Christian lectionary used as a template, a matter that was suggested long ago,⁶⁰ and which still has

⁵¹ Crapon, *Coran*, 184 f., where the author indicates how intensity has a rhythmical use by alternances of strong and weak intervals, accentuating prosodic features, how timbre is used by delimiting the rhythmical unit of the final assonance, and how pitch is maintained by correspondence between rhythmic units and the intonation of phrases. On the connection between these features and Arabic prosody, *ibid.*, 196 ff.

⁵² Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 68. ⁵³ Crapon, *Coran*, 486 f. ⁵⁴ Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 4:327.

⁵⁵ This *sūra* is sometimes regarded as having been early, but Bell (*Commentary*, 1.1) considers that, on account of its polish, it cannot be earlier than late Meccan. One needs to consider grades of polish as applying to the reworking of earlier material as well.

⁵⁶ Neuwirth, 'al-Fātiḥa', 353 ff.; Sperl, 'Prayer', 224 f. ⁵⁷ See Bell, *Commentary*, 2:368.

⁵⁸ Neuwirth, 'Readings', 735 f., 739 ff., 768 ff. who recognises there were no translations of the Psalms into Arabic available, and presents a detailed analysis of Q, 78.1–16/Ps., 104 ff., and a more extended one of Q, 55/Ps. 136, addressing Qur'ānic rereading of certain psalmodic ideas, divergences therefrom and thematic shifts, with some sparse discussion of formal structures. See the comments on the patterns of construction of the Psalms, and considerations of the liturgical aspects of composition, in *CHB*, 82.

⁵⁹ Neuwirth, 'al-Fātiḥa', 355; 'Readings', 737. ⁶⁰ For instance, Baumstark, 'Problem'.

some adherents.⁶¹ Concerning the period under study, one would have to agree that the argument for such a lectionary is circular. For the Qurʾān to have served as a lectionary, it had to have been composed as such, and for it to have been so read, it would have needed to have been conceived in these terms.⁶²

The Qurʾān was indeed declaimed, by the Apostle no less than by others who are said to have had enchanting voices, such as ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd and Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī.⁶³ There is some material on what might or might not have been special settings for Qurʾānic reading, *qirʾāʾ*,⁶⁴ a term used for recitation *ab initio*, almost synonymously with other terms used for declaiming the Word of God, and one that was persistently to indicate both oral delivery from memory and reading from a text.⁶⁵ This needs to be borne in mind in the course of the discussion of orality below.

⁶¹ For instance, Gilliot, 'Informants', 89, 92. There is in circulation a school of thought which contrives to conjecture an Ur-Qurʾān which is in essence a Christian liturgical text, whose received form needs to be construed as a deformed and, ultimately, on the assumption of an Aramaic prototype, a gibberish or pidgin form of the original. See 'Language and style', *EQ*, and the comments of Donner, 'Qurʾān', 32 ff., Griffith, 'Lore', 111 ff., 128 f., and, most especially, Saleh, 'Etymological fallacy', 670 ff. Most sensibly, Griffith ('Syriacisms', 92 ff., 98) holds that the undoubted Syriacisms of the Qurʾān are Arabic words and phrases that indicate loan translations from Syriac locutions, thematic, lexical and even grammatical, but that this cannot be taken to indicate the use of Syriac instead of Arabic words. Much is made of Syriac and words shared with other languages (including Ugaritic) in the Qurʾān, with exorbitant conclusions drawn. This is usually done irrespective of a number of straightforward facts: 54 per cent of the Arabic lexicon in general is shared with Aramaic, two languages that separated around the middle of the second millennium BC, followed, in descending order, by Hebrew, South Arabian and Geʿez, Akkadian, Ugaritic and Phoenician. In the Arabic onomasticon, some 80 per cent are shared elements, in varying forms, with other West Semitic languages. More proximately, the Qurʾān uses many terms derived from the specialised religious language of Syria, the monotheistic *koine* of the time (Zammit, *Qurʾānic Arabic*, 25, 59 f., 586, 589). It is unsurprising to see Syriac cognates in an otherwise Arabic matrix, not unlike Latin in English (Donner, 'Qurʾān', 39 f.); and Qurʾānic Syriacisms, words and phrases in Arabic diction betraying Syriac locutions and expectations of audience familiarity, would lead to the conclusion that the Syriac of the Qurʾān is no longer Syriac (Griffith, 'Lore', 115 f.). The main repertoire of foreign vocabulary in the Qurʾān is still Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, with a variety of subsequent later additions, perhaps most amply Carter, 'Vocabulary', but one must note, with Bell (Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 85), following al-Suyūṭī, that of Jeffery's list of some 275 foreign words in the Qurʾān some three quarters can be shown to have been in use in the Arabic lexicon, and the remaining seventy or so may have been in use in ordinary speech. One example would be *al-fulk*, occurring some two dozen times in the Qurʾān, meaning a ship. This derives ultimately from the Greek *ἐφελκion*, referring to a small boat towed to a ship in sailor's jargon of the Red Sea region, and appearing also in Ḥijāzī (but not in other) poetry. The implication would be that it was in dialectal use (Donner, *Narratives*, 57 ff.). On nautical vocabulary, and its connection with the Red Sea and Ethiopia, see Bell, *Origins*, 29.

⁶² Van Ess, 'Siegel', 58.

⁶³ TAB, 337 f.; *SIH*, 1.275; Talbi, 'Qirʾāʾ', 185; 'Recitation of the Qurʾān', *EQ*, 4.369.

⁶⁴ Various occasions on which the Prophet declaimed the Word of God are mentioned (conveniently in al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.205 f.), but no definite pattern of association is discernible.

⁶⁵ This is attested by one of the very earliest Arabic philological works (Khan, *Exegetischen Teile*, 256), defining Reading thus: *qaraʾtʿ l-Qurʾānʿ ʿan dhahrī qalbīʿ aw nazartʿ filīʿ*.

But it is highly probable that portions of what was to become the Qur'ān thus read were delivered in the course of prayer rituals as they developed through processes of iteration and reiteration.⁶⁶ But it is difficult to ascribe a liturgical status to the text as a whole, and the details of prayer ritual as they developed are still obscure. Of the portions with liturgical relevance, we have what was to become the first *sūra*, *al-fātiḥa* and the two short propitiatory *sūras* called *al-mu'awwidhatān* (Q, 113 and 114), reputedly favoured by the Prophet in the course of prayer,⁶⁷ almost archetypically suited for it, as was also the *basmala*, an invocation which has the grammatical character of an oath, occurring in only five *sūras*.⁶⁸ Much the same might be said of Q, 112, *sūrat al-nās*.⁶⁹ Other chapters were recited on various fixed occasions,⁷⁰ such as some forty of what were later to become the canonical seventy-three verses of *barā' al-al-anfāl*, dealing with the rescinding of the treaty with the Meccans sent by Muḥammad with Abū Bakr and 'Alī to be proclaimed during pilgrimage seasons.⁷¹ But these have an oratorical and hortative rather than a liturgical character; others again have the character of admonitions, commands, prohibitions, polemics and narratives.

There seems to be no credible way of reconstructing a clear line of development whereby certain Qur'ānic enunciations were eventually to acquire a role in ritual prayer that was later set in legal works, or how and when the effacement of the distinction between Muḥammad's ritual propitiatory formulae and the Qur'ānic text was accomplished. Nor does there seem to be a way of determining how and when the *fātiḥa* acquired its liturgical role in being recited at the commencement both of ritual prayer and of Qur'ānic recitation in other settings, and indeed at other occasions as well, but one might suppose that this occurred at more or less the same time as *ṣalāt* was, in incipient form, instituted in the late Meccan period. It is absent (like the *mu'awwadhatān*) from the codex of Ibn Mas'ūd.⁷²

⁶⁶ Al-Bukhārī (*Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.193 ff.) registers the different parts of the Qur'ān recited at different prayers, but this account is likely to have been written retrospectively in light of arrangements resulting from a long development, although a reconstruction might well be possible.

⁶⁷ Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, §§ 1755, 1757 ff. ⁶⁸ 'Basmala', *EQ*.

⁶⁹ Among others, see Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1.12 ff.; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 1.86 ff., 108 ff., and cf. Madigan, *Self-image*, 50.

⁷⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.204 ff. A systematic source-critical and ritual-historical study of this material is still to come.

⁷¹ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 8.61, 67. Renan (*Études*, 174) had described the Qur'ān as Muḥammad's 'ordres du jour', hyperbolically perhaps, but not entirely inaccurately with respect to some verses.

⁷² The introduction under the Umayyads of the *mu'awwadhatān* into prayer rituals in al-Kūfa (where Ibn Mas'ūd was active before al-Ḥajjāj proscribed his codex) by its governor 'Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād, who died in 67/686 (Hamdan, *Koranisierung*, 137 f.), need not imply that this was necessarily an

Its status was contested from a very early period, by no less a person than Anas b. Mālik, and continued to be contested thereafter, on a variety of grounds. Most discussions on this matter have been in the context of later exegetical discourses and their concerns.⁷³ Whatever the facts of the matter, it is clear that a variety of Qur'ānic parts, such as the *sūras* of the Cow or of Āl 'Imrān, were recited in locations of ritual prayer, but it is not clear whether they formed part of the prayer ritual itself.⁷⁴

As suggested, the Qur'ān as a developing live delivery by Muḥammad and his followers was a liturgical text only in part.⁷⁵ It was a series of oracular enunciations. The process by which enunciations were construed as Qur'ānic had far broader bearings, and this is the process that we might designate as authorship, in which we shall find further confirmation of the view that the Paleo-Islamic Qur'ān was a process of communication in action, not a sequential scriptural text, but nevertheless a Book. The text enunciated reflected circumstances or referred to them, but also responded to occasions, some very specific.⁷⁶

Declamation, reiteration, composition

The processes of composition and textual growth have been most helpfully described as *Fortschreibung*, implying the development of a self-referential corpus which amplified and expanded previous portions, and interposed and interpolated other enunciations.⁷⁷ This goes very much in the same sense as Bell's analysis of the text and of its growth in terms of

innovation of his, and underlines the complexity of the relationship between Qur'ānic composition and ritual prayer and, indeed, what must be seen as having been still work in progress, with a variety of local forms and imperatives.

⁷³ Khan, *Exegetischen Teile*, 115; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1.11f.; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 1.111 f.; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.177 ff. Overall, the question of which of Muḥammad's pronouncements representing the word of God were considered to be Qur'ānic, and which not, is still a moot point, the question having been posed by Graham (*Divine Word*) in terms of a functional distinction related to prayer, a view which would now require some revision, refinement and further elaboration in light of more recent scholarship.

⁷⁴ For instance, as desired by 'Umar I (al-Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 52), continuing at al-Kūfa during the Umayyad period (al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.274 f.).

⁷⁵ In speaking of the loss of liturgical function in Medina, Neuwirth ('Rezitationstext', 98 f.) is perhaps establishing much too strong a claim for the liturgical function of Muḥammad's oracular delivery, and much too neat a division between this function and others.

⁷⁶ Q. 25.35 f., referring to God, here speaking in the first person plural, sending Books to Moses and sending him off to destroy those who would not recognise God's Signs, is seen by Bell (*Commentary*, 2.7) to be a virtual admission that the Qur'ān comes in response to external stimuli. See the more general statement in Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 74 ff.

⁷⁷ Sinai, *Fortschreibung*, 92 (where it is noted that this should not be taken for a general explanation of the Qur'ān's textual growth), 153 ff. The author fleshed this out in great detail with reference to the Abraham pericopes, in chs. 6 and 7.

juxtapositions, semantic expansions, insertions and interpolations, revisions involving alternative continuations of certain verses, recorded sequentially in the written text.⁷⁸ Perhaps most poignantly in this context, the Qur'ān, as it grew, declared certain previous Qur'ānic enunciations to have been abrogated. God is entirely at liberty to withdraw pronouncements made (*raf*).⁷⁹ It was a corpus of elementary enunciations, *āyas*, that were iterated, recalled, reiterated, expanded, glossed and inflected by various voices, committed to writing which, in turn, was subject to a variety of possible alterations, editorial and otherwise, in the course of time.

Much of the scholarship cited refers to the written canonical text, to which we shall come below. For now, as the question of authorship or reiterative delivery is discussed, it is important to continue the consideration of the public *Sitz im Leben* out of which the Qur'ān emerged. God enjoined His Apostle not to deliver his revelation precipitately: he should not proclaim it before it had been fully delivered to him, always seeking that God increase his instruction (Q, 20.114), and he should not 'move his tongue' too rapidly before enunciation had been properly gathered (Q, 75.16 ff.). We shall come later to 'collation' (*jam'* and *qirān*), and its implications for the written redaction of the text.⁸⁰ Apart from indicating the possible pains to which Muḥammad went in the process of composition,⁸¹ these injunctions bespeak communicative composition in a continuous sense, perhaps with hesitations, interruptions, lapses or awkwardnesses of expression. This matter is brought out all the clearer by God, speaking in the first person plural, advising His Apostle that He shall keep instructing him lest he forget (Q, 87.6), presumably what he ought to compose, to enunciate or to recall.

Proclamation and recall, reiteration, modification, amplification and self-reflexion: such marked the body of Muḥammadan enunciations that were ultimately to be redacted and canonised as the Paleo-Muslim scripture. The idea that all that was pronounced by Muḥammad was, however fragmentary,⁸² separately and potentially Qur'ān, seems to have been very early,⁸³ a notion of performative *pars pro toto* which will be discussed further below. Each enunciation was authoritatively oracular, but canonicity involved the literary delimitation of oracular or para-oracular materials to

⁷⁸ Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 93 f.

⁷⁹ See GQ, 234 ff. and Gilliot, 'Verset', 73 ff.

⁸⁰ The term 'collation' – a word with a broad semantic field – is used in preference to the more common 'collection' in order both to avoid conveying any sense of completeness and to stress the textual character of the process.

⁸¹ Cf. Bell, *Commentary*, 2.461.

⁸² Cf. Paret, 'Geschichtsquelle', 145 f.

⁸³ Bell, *Commentary*, 1.401, 474, commenting on Q, 13.30, 17.82; Hirschfeld, *Researches*, 33; Boislevau, 'Canonisation', §§ 29, 51 ff.

which we shall come.⁸⁴ Not all of Muḥammad's pronouncements were to become canonically Qur'ānic; apart from what became *ḥadīth*, traditions have preserved *ḥadīth qudsī*, divine revelations not recorded in the Qur'ān. This does not necessarily reflect the *Sitz im Leben* of revelation, but may well have been the result of later literary classification.⁸⁵

The Qur'ān is a book that can appear confusing in its communicative setting. In addressing its hearers, the Qur'ān is multivocal, and deploys three anonymous grammatical persons, shifting in the course of the text, sometimes unexpectedly, a fact which is likely to reflect the process of collation as distinct from continuous redaction: the first person singular, the third person singular and the first person plural.⁸⁶ Muḥammad is clearly the speaker in some verses, especially earlier ones. He is addressed on his own in other verses, or transmits revelation in his own words. Some intermediary sent by God or proceeding from Him is a possible speaker in other verses,⁸⁷ sometimes with puzzling situations where the speaker may be either God or an extra-mundane intermediary,⁸⁸ not least when God is spoken of in the third person singular, which could on occasion imply the Apostle as the speaker. God speaks in the first and third persons singular. Both phenomena, pronominal shifts and multivocality, are commensurate with both the variety of settings during which vatic speech was delivered and the purposes of delivery, and the uncertain boundaries between various extra-mundane beings.⁸⁹

Thus God speaks, directly, through an intermediary or behind a veil (Q, 42.51), and clearly Muḥammad also speaks. Muḥammad sometimes figures as the addressee, and a wider public is that which is most often addressed. The 'sending down' (*tanzīl*), usually used for the act of Revelation, is expressed both in the first and third persons singular (for instance, Q, 39.6, 57.25). All that might be retained inferentially is the impression of a complex of initial settings for the delivery of revelation. This is complicated further by a matter discussed at some length in [chapters 4](#) and [5](#), that

⁸⁴ Cf. Sinai, *Fortschreibung*, 5.

⁸⁵ See Graham, *Divine Word*, 15, and the sketch and discussion of scholarship at 51 ff. and 81 ff. Wansbrough (*Quranic Studies*, 1) says quite correctly that revelation became scripture once it was separated from prophetic *logia*, although he sees this separation as one that took place over a vastly longer period of time than is borne out by historical fact.

⁸⁶ These pronominal shifts are discussed in Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 65 ff., and usefully tabulated in detail, with an attempt at interpretation, in Robinson, *Discovering*, 245 ff. and ch. 11, *passim.*, with a discussion of the rhetoric of Allāh as implied speaker (at 253). Hoffmann (*Poetic Qur'ān*, 3, 147 ff.) regards pronominal shifts as a structural feature, and discusses the phenomenon suggestively.

⁸⁷ Examples: Bell, *Commentary*, 2.36, 41, 224, 276. ⁸⁸ Bell, *Commentary*, 1.118 f.

⁸⁹ If working in terms of comparative canonisation, one might consider abrupt shifts in grammatical subject and construction in the Old Testament text: CHB, 78.

of transmogrification, involving as much epiphanies of the divinity as demonic inspiration, and the uncanny appearances of Diḥya al-Kalbī in the form of Muḥammad, the inspiration of Ibn Ṣayyād, the identification of Musaylima and al-Raḥmān, and similar matters. This will have to rest undecidable in its details until it is properly researched, except for the general proposition that Qur'ānic chronology, as known today, indicates a tendency towards a more consistent rhetoric of address as the establishment of authority and agency became clearer.⁹⁰

It has been suggested recently that the authorship of the Qur'ān should be expanded to include a multiplicity of discursive agents among whom Muḥammad can be viewed as a moderator,⁹¹ or that it may have been constituted progressively in a milieu incarnated in the figure of the Apostle.⁹² Expressed in these general terms, this is improbable, although Muslim traditions relate in some detail many instances of the 'concordance' (*muwāfaqa*) of God and 'Umar I, with the latter proffering opinions that were promptly supported and confirmed by appropriate revelations,⁹³ presumably uttered by the Apostle. Moreover, there is a recognition in Muslim traditions of a wider multivocality in the Qur'ān, not confined to the Prophet, Gabriel and other angels, but involving the Companions Sa'd b. Mu'ādh, Zayd b. Ḥāritha and Muṣ'ab b. 'Umayr, in addition to an anonymous woman.⁹⁴ We have also seen that Muḥammad had recognised that Khālīd b. Sinān had received a revelation corresponding literally to one he received himself. Finally, mention must be made of biblical material in the Qur'ān that has been mentioned and which will be discussed further below.

In light of the above, it serves little purpose to envelop 'Umar I or 'Alī in a veil of vatic mystery alongside Muḥammad, on the assumption that they were thought, in all probability by later hagiographic traditions and as part of a florilegium of epigones, to have been directly inspired and addressed by God (*muḥaddathūn*).⁹⁵ The attribution of direct inspiration is, in all probability, to be doubted, not least as the growing authority of Muḥammad, vatic and mystical as well as political, would have precluded this. After all, prophecy is an indivisible and onerous office, God cannot

⁹⁰ Cf. Sinai, 'Self-referentiality', 111.

⁹¹ Sinai, 'Orientalism', 147 ff., 151, 151–2 n. ⁹² Gilliot, 'Coran 17', *passim*.

⁹³ Most famously and canonically, the imposition of the *ḥijāb*, seclusion behind a curtain, on Muḥammad's wives, the adoption of Maqām Ibrāhīm as a location of ritual prayer, and the lot of the captives at the Battle of Badr. But there were other instances of such concordance, the term having become an exegetical notion (Sinai, 'Orientalism', 150): the statement that man was fashioned of clay and that charges of adultery against 'Ā'isha were mendacious and malicious, the proscription of wine, the barring of the *munāfiqūn* from communal prayer, and other, smaller matters: Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, §§ 1456 ff. and al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.115 f., and the verses there indicated.

⁹⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.116 f. ⁹⁵ Cf. Bashear, 'Fārūq', 57, 64 f.

be expected to be promiscuously communicative, and the existence of a coven of apostolic speakers is most unlikely, although this does not entirely exclude the possibility that some other beings may have whispered and insinuated. 'Umar I himself seems to have warned against the proliferation of uncontrolled attributions of prophetic enunciations,⁹⁶ and one would expect him to have taken an even more rigorous view of Qur'ānic materials. Yet clearly the notion was available, has very early support in Qur'ānic readings and needs investigation,⁹⁷ without its necessarily implying any discursive agency other than Muḥammad, irrespective of who it was that uttered a view that was then confirmed by Muḥammadan enunciation.

In view of this, and of indicators for multivocality in different forms, it is unsurprising that the Qur'ānic text may be seen metaphorically to appear as a palimpsest. This is a text whose force of attribution, that is, its canonical status prior to the formal establishment of the canonical *muṣḥaf* and, prior to that, the *maṣāḥif* or *ṣuḥuf* of canonical authority, came ultimately to indicate a sole authority.⁹⁸ It is a text to be read *in statu nascendi* and in its pre-canonical forms.⁹⁹

The Qur'ān is thus a text attributed to revelations received by Muḥammad, and is in most likelihood a record of predominantly Muḥammadan pronouncements relayed directly and by others who reiterated it, declaimed it and transmitted it in written form as well. Material of arguably non-Muḥammadan provenance, such as that arising from concordance or intertextuality (in all probability delivered by the Prophet himself, or written down at his behest), as well as what might be identified as interpolations, would in all likelihood have been inserted according to the principle of *imitatio*, as was the case with the pseudoepigrapha generically considered.¹⁰⁰ The Qur'ān in its process of formation and canonisation was a polyvalent communicative act, an enunciation and, increasingly, a text, revising itself (notably in terms of *naskh*, abrogation)¹⁰¹ with

⁹⁶ Goldziher, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 5.91 ff.

⁹⁷ It was used as such by Shī'ī divines, with clear reference to 'Alī, but is also reported to have been supported by the codex of Ubayy b. Ka'b and in the reading of Ibn 'Abbās: Bar-Asher, 'Readings', no. 36 (Q, 22.52).

⁹⁸ Again, there are concordances with the emergent canonisation of the OT: Chapman, 'Biblical canon', 38.

⁹⁹ Neuwirth, 'In the full light', 15 f., where canon is understood after the image of what it later became, rather than the authoritative character of the text inherent in its earlier enunciative and authorial attribution.

¹⁰⁰ Sawyer, *Sacred Languages*, 101 f. If this were factored in into studies of the transmission of Muslim traditions, a greater degree of historical verisimilitude would be attained.

¹⁰¹ On this notion as elaborated in later traditions, al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 2.31 ff., under conditions considered in *TG*, 1.36 f.

increasing self-referentiality – all the while, accumulating sanctity and, in effect, canonisation *in statu nascendi*.

Nature of the pre-literary canon

The deliveries and redactions of the Qur'ān were, as has been suggested, simultaneously a process of canonisation, ultimately taking the historically durable form of the 'Uthmānic Vulgate. Whether this consisted of Muḥammad's *ipsissima vox*, integral or partial, is not a matter that can be resolved, although this point has been considered to be definitively established,¹⁰² or at least to be highly likely.¹⁰³ The earliest stage of Qur'ānic revelation, a loose body of material delivered to and by Muḥammad, constituting one component of pre-literary canonical material, must be seen as irrecoverable, with the possible exception of some form of the short cataclysmic and apotropaic chapters. There is no recoverable urtext, the likelihood being that there existed what Epp termed 'pre-decessor text-forms',¹⁰⁴ possibly including material just mentioned. The prevailing implicit assumption that the Qur'ān is a register of verses as first pronounced needs serious reconsideration; most conceal a pre-canonical history of enunciation, declamation and reiteration by a variety of voices, no longer recoverable.

Nevertheless, it will still be possible to model the emergence of the Qur'ānic canon from its pre-literary canonical career of iteration, reiteration, redaction and emendation (see [fold-out diagram](#)). Such a model is in itself hypothetical; it is constructed by inference from facts arising from the material – codicological and literary-structural – aspects of the Qur'ān, and from facts, types of events, and indices ascertainable from the Arabic literary sources; codicological and paleographic studies are a growth area of decisive importance here. It is, further, informed by more general considerations regarding processes of iteration, performance, reiteration, redaction and canonisation overall; none of these occurred once only, but they continued throughout Muḥammad's Apostolic career. The credibility of the model would arise from the claim here made, that it accounts adequately for the facts of the case and allows for the interpretation of these facts.

¹⁰² Burton, *Collection*, 240 f. and ch. 8, *passim*.

¹⁰³ Neuwirth, 'Qur'ān', 100.

¹⁰⁴ Small, *Textual Criticism*, 163 f., 180. See the most suggestive discussion of the pre-literary New Testament texts and of the highly complex character of the very notion of an original text, with a call for humility before the 300,000 odd extant NT variants, by Epp, 'Multivalence', 246 f., 276 and 269, for the idea of a 'pre-original text'. See also 255 ff. for the history of scholarship.

Thus, to the probability that the Qur'ān may record some of Muḥammad's pronouncements, directly or duly redacted following their iterations and reiterations, one must add linguistic and socio-linguistic aspects of what ultimately resulted in the Vulgate and other redactions. Thus one might account for the mutations undergone by God's Word as originally enunciated, and for circumstances accompanying this enunciation. One might also be able to consider the various interfaces and feedback relations between oral deliveries by the Apostle and by others, between oral performances and redaction (in *ṣuḥuf* containing a variety of proto-Qur'ānic text) and the feedbacks between them, and between this cluster of textual relations and what ultimately emerged as literary Qur'ānic codices, all of which will have occurred continually in a manner and through increasingly complex pathways, byways and feedback loops, in circles that broadened as Muḥammad's influence burgeoned and as the circulation of his vatic speech, oral and written, widened. The cumulative results arose from a number of such processes occurring in parallel, eventually to be whittled down by the process of literary canonsation and by the collation of autograph and other codices.

It is well to recall that the process of literary canonisation cannot be construed in terms of a bald transition from the oral to the written, although it was that too. The two constitute a continuum of composition, inflection and recomposition, related by multiple feedbacks, a situation in which neither is primary or epiphenomenal. These iterations and recompositions in various media created verses, *āyās*, the atoms of the Qur'ān, and these were in due course and with the increasing moment of scriptural intent, put together into chapters, *sūras*, which constitute serial concatenations of verses, arranged in paratactic sequence.¹⁰⁵ It has been indicated above that parataxis does have determinate rhetorical effect in oral delivery. But this will need to be seen as secondary to written redaction: parataxis belongs, after all, to the genre of lists, and is thus a consequence of writing.¹⁰⁶ Collation in this sense is an early phenomenon, constituting textual collections in *ṣuḥuf*, by Muḥammad and members of his entourage, that were to contain parts of what eventually became the literary canon, parts that constituted Qur'ānic chapters, and clusters of chapters that we shall come to in due course.

These textual combinations bespeak the history of composition, pure units of textual sequence, not of textual structure, not necessarily the

¹⁰⁵ On the formal elements of verses, Neuwirth, *Komposition*, 117 ff.

¹⁰⁶ See Mainberger, *Kunst*, 5 f., 108, 178 f.; Goody, *Interface*, 27.

reflection of continuous live recitation or of concerted editorial effort, but effects of juxtaposition; pronominal shifts and uncertainties in the Qur'ān are a striking illustration of this.¹⁰⁷ The Qur'ān was a process of performative communication, persuasion and pressure, responding to developing circumstances, thereby bearing repetition, reiteration, inflection, self-abrogation and other forms of self-reflexivity, and manifold interpolation, matters already clear to Muslim exegesis and its historical and quasi-historical discipline of *asbāb al-nuzūl*.¹⁰⁸ It was not a neat collection of treatises on creation, law or revelation, or a body of connected pseudohistorical narratives.

The oft-repeated statement that the written Qur'ān served primarily as an aide-mémoire in the service of recitation, that it was in practice secondary to recitation, and that as a consequence the written redaction is not a documentary text apart from its memorisation and oral delivery,¹⁰⁹ whatever this may actually mean, seems to me to misconstrue the question. After all, the memory to be aided is the remembrance of enunciations lodged in a written base text.¹¹⁰ The base text is not a prompt but the very text to be recited, that is, aurally actualised, whatever inflections aural preformance will bring to it and feed back into its future redactions and performances. In effect, reciting from memory is the oral performance of a written text. This is clear from codicological and paleographic evidence no less than from the nature of canon and the anthropology of reading; if anything, it is oral traditions of recitation that are dependent upon the literary traditions, which take the lead in the feedback relation between the two.¹¹¹ This was not so much an oral culture, whatever this might be intended to mean in the circumstances, as a culture that prized memorisation.

¹⁰⁷ Due care needs to be given to the orthographic effects, where the unvoiced consonantal text may be ambiguous. One example among very many, noted by Blachère (*Introduction*, 78 n. 101), concerns Q, 21.4, where variant readings *qāl* (he said) and *qul* (say!) can both be yielded by the consonantal *ql* from a text pre-dating the use of the medial *alif*. The result will be different addressees.

¹⁰⁸ This exegetical discipline has been described as working backwards from Qur'ānic verses, providing narrative situations in which interpretation could be embodied: Peters, 'Historical Muḥammad', 301 f., 311–12 n. 48. For a catalogue of works pertaining to this genre, see Rippin, 'Asbāb', 2 ff.

¹⁰⁹ Graham, 'Qur'ān', 34. More recent research, assenting to this view but adding that to the primacy of the aural should be added the written text (Schoeler, *Genesis*, ch. 2 *passim*), strikes me as far too vague, suggestive of a certain tokenism, and in need of firmer conceptualisation and closer specification. Similarly, attempting to deal with the complexity of the issue by stating that the written text is of a 'private' nature (Cook, 'Opponents', 476 ff., 504, with reference to *ḥadīth*) seems summarily to beg the question.

¹¹⁰ This theme is discussed at length in *ALS*.

¹¹¹ Pretzl, *Fortführung*, 8 f.; Small, *Textual Criticism*, 147 f., 149.

Writing and oral delivery were in phase with respect both to the Qur'ān and to poetry, as has been recognised.¹¹² The argument for the primacy of oral delivery – as a socio-linguistic phenomenon – of both the original pronouncement and its reiterations, needs to consider the crucial factor that the original delivery by Muḥammad acquired, from the moment that the notion of scripture was adopted, the character of fixity in principle. This holds irrespective of its being lodged in memory or inscribed on some writing material, and irrespective of how emblematic this was, or of the extent to which this principle may have been actualised. But this need not imply exactitude of rendition, but rather mimetic rendition, reiteration and repetition.

In addition, there seems to have been, in the process of redaction during the time of Muḥammad, a distinction made between a text that might be seen as scripturally accomplished, and others still in process. This should alert us to the possible basic meanings of *sūra muḥkama* and of *sūra mutashābiḥa*, the distinction indicating confirmation by reiteration rather than ambiguity.¹¹³ The same might be said of *mathānī*,¹¹⁴ also conveying the sense of reiteration, beyond later elaborations, theorisations and mystifications of this term.

In the Qur'ān, the original proclamation, written or remembered, together with its primary and secondary oral performances, reiterations, aural reception, and transcripts or dictations of aural reception, were inextricably linked and fed upon each other with the growth of the corpus. These complex imbrications need to be seen *in statu nascendi*, in so far as this is possible to reconstruct schematically and, wherever possible, in detail, working from the one fixed point available, the accomplished written text,¹¹⁵ and from such fragments as remained on record or as still exist.

Central to this model of reconstruction and interpretation is the assumption that, in the course of formation as well as in its post-canonical condition, every fragment, declaimed from memory or read out, was a synecdoche for the whole, a *pars pro toto*, exuding charisma and betokening

¹¹² Déroche, 'Beauté', 22.

¹¹³ See al-Aynī, *Umda*, 9.339, lines 9–11, 16; 340, lines 3–5, with reference to *muḥkam* conveying the sense of completeness for a statement, in traditions attributed to Sa'īd b. Jubayr and Ibn 'Abbās, and the sense of the lack of abrogation. See also Bell, *Commentary*, 2.185, 276; Sinai, *Fortschreibung*, 82.

¹¹⁴ This term is often taken by modern scholarship to refer to retribution pericopes, for no better reason than a connection with Syriac (Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 134), but is more likely to refer to reiteration (Sinai, *Fortschreibung*, 82 n. 24).

¹¹⁵ Such is also the case with the text of the Old Testament (*CHB*, 74 ff. and 79), which was in gestation for an incomparably longer period of time.

presence.¹¹⁶ After all, a canonical text is a Word inhabited. In this context, the historical or ethnographic approach, when practicable, is more fruitful interpretatively than the doctrinal or the philological. Moreover, the common assumption is that to whatever is taken to be canon are attributed omnisignificance and unity, and that it belongs formally to the genre of lists, closure being the canon's mark of discrimination in this context.¹¹⁷ Unity describes the endowment of a body of enunciations, singly or in combination, with binding authority arising at their socio-political points of articulation,¹¹⁸ and has been described above as being governed by the principle of *pars pro toto*, where every fragment declaimed or inscribed is Qur'an. Closure in its turn is as much a literary as a political phenomenon. These will now be taken up in turn, considered as distinct, without implications of mutual causation.¹¹⁹ One needs to address the agency deciding unity and coherence, and that deciding upon closure.

Both the unity of the canon, however internally diverse in terms of its physical media of transmission, and its closure after the definitive sealing of the literary canon, describe an operation that moves from 'predecessor text-forms', oral as well as *ṣuḥuf*, on to a variety of autographic text-forms (the various *maṣāḥif*, autographed or without autograph¹²⁰), to increasingly authoritative text-forms and to canonical text-forms allowing for textual refinements and formal emendations, as we shall see.¹²¹ The two moments correspond respectively to a tradition-history level of analysis, and a composition level.¹²² In the former, which would correspond, in the history of the Paleo-Muslim scripture, to the production of individual *ṣuḥuf* and *maṣāḥif* and fragmentary redactions and their public declamation, revelation as it progressed functioned performatively as already canonical in the

¹¹⁶ This is not unlike the understanding of the canon by early Christians, who tended to regard as canonical whatever text-form of a gospel or letter was received, accuracy or variations are not likely to have been deemed relevant: Epp, 'Multivalence', 274.

¹¹⁷ Smith, 'Canons', 306 and 303 ff.

¹¹⁸ Cf. *mutatis mutandis*, the most suggestive analyses of Legendre, *Amour*, 66 f., 90 ff.

¹¹⁹ Cf. the distinction between Canon I, vectored by extra-textual activities and factors, and characterised by function, and Canon II, where the canonical text is seen to be independently salient irrespective of function, in Folkert, 'Canons', *passim*, and the comment of Smith, 'Canon', 301 f., characterising the Protestant Bible as the model for Canon II and the dominant model in Biblical Studies, and suggesting, reasonably, that there was no Canon II before the Reformation. That this Protestant paradigm of interpretation is also dominant in studies of the Qur'an is evident.

¹²⁰ Such as the lower writing on the Ṣan'a' palimpsest C-I, with strong indications that it formed part of an integral codex. The text was reconstituted by Sadeghi and Goudarzi, 'Ṣan'a' I'.

¹²¹ This is the scheme developed by Epp, 'Multivalence', 276 f. (these include emendations motivated theologically, possible once the literary canon is constituted: *ibid.*, 274), put to convincing use in the analysis of the Qur'an by Small, *Textual Criticism*, 7 and *passim*.

¹²² See Dunn, *Living Word*, 146 ff. For greater detail, see especially Sanders, *Torah*, and Childs, *Introduction*.

communities becoming habituated to the idea. In the latter phase, we have a situation where the material was given a durable form, and the canon of scripture itself and as a whole acquired an enduring authority, later to be at once closed in a literary sense, and open to the hermeneutical possibilities of reading by exegesis and related operations.¹²³

What needs to be stressed is that the process of Qur'ānic redaction was one that combined oral transmission, with reiteration by many voices in a variety of forms, inflections and variants, and written preservation and revision. The two fed upon each other in progressive feedback loops and grew together as a social process responsive to external circumstances. Qur'anising a variety of circumstances 'by osmosis', this also involved the 'secondary' Qur'ānisation of an evolving and an abiding imaginary carried by Muḥammad and his environment.¹²⁴ Authority was vested in the person of Muḥammad, at once voice and text, sustained and aided by the memories, suggestions and records of others, a prerogative that extended to revision, reiteration, interpolation, expansion, self-reflexion and self-reference, abrogation and confirmation, gloss and other manners of a continuous *aggiornamento*. This would account for what appear as frequent repetitions,¹²⁵ which need to be seen as an effect of live reiteration, not without modification, and the record of these reiterations. It would also account for the fact that codicological evidence shows that the more significant variants are absent from extant manuscripts, but present in earlier palimpsests.¹²⁶ What appear as corrections in the earliest manuscripts and palimpsests, the study of which is now a growth area of decisive potential importance, need to be integrated into the dynamic of writing and repetition, rather than be treated as tampering. Overall, what needs to be envisaged is a process of growth that, for a proper understanding, allows for a distension and other manners of modification of Muḥammad's pronouncements as they were circulated, and as they fed back into later iterations, constituting autograph texts and, ultimately, the later canonical text.

The process of literary development was thus one of the collation of revealed apostolic *logia* growing upon itself, such that various writings and pronouncements were integrated under prophetic signature. After Muḥammad's initial Warner/Soothsayer phase, of which only fragments

¹²³ The Gospels, authored by specific persons *ab initio*, present different problems of interpretation, although one must also bear in mind the continuing lack of clarity concerning their earlier periods of compilation and redaction, especially the 'Q' text and the Gospel of John.

¹²⁴ See Sinai, *Fortschreibung*, 51 ff.

¹²⁵ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 2.

¹²⁶ Small, *Textual Criticism*, 101 f., 174 f., 177.

were preserved, there had clearly emerged a scripturalist intention, defined by the way in which the Apostle's words were intended and received, rendering the canonical character of what became the *muṣḥaf* part of the process of growth itself, long before it came to be sealed. Not unnaturally, this implied, as is well attested by the character of the received Qur'ānic text, the preservation of what may appear as random and diffuse materials, all of which was to be canonical, irrespective of whether it had been preserved orally until redacted, or redacted, reiterated, modified and edited.¹²⁷

Being conceived as scripture, therefore, the Qur'ān, when proclaimed, may be seen as an oral/aural medium for the delivery of a literary product, a 'speaking object'¹²⁸ conceived in the literary terms of scripture. This would arise from the definitiveness of each and every proclamation that counted as Qur'ān, unstable as this may have been, but always with a presumption of an underlying stability conveying the presence of its stable divine origin and by the scripturalising intent, which is what is understood by textual unity. This is well illustrated and amply preserved in the canonical text's abrogated verses, and a variety of other features that betokened a continuing, live composition over a period of two decades or so. Thus we have arhythmical phrases that permit the detection of lacunae, corruptions, accretions and dislocations, in addition to lexical improbabilities and compositional displacements.¹²⁹ We have grammatical incongruities and inconsistencies,¹³⁰ not to speak of discrepant pseudohistorical accounts contained within,¹³¹ comparable to contradictions in cosmogonic and other accounts. Thus also there are themes occurring at different stages of literary composition, with glosses and interpolations,¹³² and indeed verses that appear to have been afterthoughts.¹³³ Overall, the disjointedness of many parts of the Qur'ān indicates that there is seldom evidence of sustained unified composition.¹³⁴

These considerations, ultimately rendering the familiar, mechanical and simplistic statements on the oral status of Qur'ān, kept alive somehow

¹²⁷ Cf. Chapman, 'Canon', 37 f., and Sinai, *Fortschreibung*, 77 ff., who spoke of the growth of textual 'nuclei'.

¹²⁸ Legendre, *Amour*, 82, 86 f. ¹²⁹ Crapon, *Coran*, 184, 494 ff.

¹³⁰ This has given rise to a call for emendations of the text, on which see 'Textual criticism', *EQ*, but this call betokens a misunderstanding of the Qur'ān's composition as process. One might recall that modern editions of the Gospels (B. Weiss published the first modern critical edition in 1902) detected similar classes of 'errors' arising from harmonisation, omissions, additions, alterations of word order, orthographic variants and interchanges of words.

¹³¹ For instance, al-'Arabī, 'Tadhīl', 379 ff., 347 ff. (on Moses). Bell (*Commentary*, 2.34) gives a clear account of different versions of the story of Ṣāliḥ and Thamūd.

¹³² Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 25, 27 f. ¹³³ For instance, Bell, *Commentary*, 2.502 f.

¹³⁴ Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 73, the most salient exception being the *sūra* of Joseph.

and redacted as it was first pronounced, seem hollow, in the same way as statements on the oral status of *ḥadīth* seem 'hollow'.¹³⁵ It has been noted, even by scholars of a generally hypersceptical approach, that early indications suggest that Muḥammad himself wrote down Revelations he received (Q, 25.4 f., 29.48),¹³⁶ quite apart from the vast amount of well-known material indicating very early redactions of his enunciations by a variety of followers, generally described as scribal secretaries. Extensive reports on parchment records (*ṣuḥuf*) of Muḥammadan pronouncements kept by 'Ā'isha, and others in Muḥammad's hand, cannot be without a decided measure of verisimilitude.¹³⁷ The same might be said of reports of a collation in the custody of Ḥafṣa.¹³⁸ Both would qualify as autograph texts.

We have indications not only of materials recorded, but also of materials scripturally collected, constituting autograph texts generally known as variant readings.¹³⁹ The Qur'ān speaks clearly of collation, *jam'*, with reference to itself (Q, 75.17).¹⁴⁰ Apart from the paucity and the 'sporadic' nature of detail, noted by one careful scholar,¹⁴¹ this material has a strong indicative value. The accusation that Muḥammad was retelling Fables of the Ancients, *asāṭīr al-awwālīn*, needs to be read as a reference to an act of writing.¹⁴² As a consequence, one could indeed speak of very early Qur'ānic redaction, without implications of completeness or of closure, and without necessarily being able to sketch the details of its form, which must have

¹³⁵ Thus Cook, 'Opponents', 439, who recognises this clearly without drawing the necessary conclusions, basing his study on the investigation of later positions towards writing, without due regard to the relation of these positions to actual practices. Cook (520 f.) fully appreciates the incongruity of these positions in a literate society, and regards them unnecessarily as a residue of Rabbinism, a point further discussed by Schoeler (*Oral and Written*, ch. 5), with reference to the notion of an oral Torah.

¹³⁶ De Prémare, *Ta'sīs*, 313. Watt (*Bell's Introduction*, 34 ff.) avers that, although evidence for Muḥammad's ability to write is weak, it is nevertheless not to be excluded, in the way of Meccan merchants. Crone ('How did the Qur'ānic pagans', 397) is more emphatic about a higher level of literacy.

¹³⁷ Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, § 1711, and other reports in an edition I have not been able to consult, studied very carefully by Comerro, *Traditions*, 160, 163 and ch. 8, *passim*.

¹³⁸ On which see Comerro, *Traditions*, 56 ff.

¹³⁹ See Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2.306 f. Among these: Ubayy b. Ka'b, Mu'ādh b. Jabal, Zayd b. Thābit, Ibn Mas'ūd, 'Uthmān b. 'Affān, Mujammi' b. Jāriya (who is reported to have made a collation of the whole corpus, however defined, bar two or three *sūras*) – hence, one would presume, his personal name was a hypocoristic. Also reported to have collected the whole Qur'ān at the time of Muḥammad were the obscure figures of Qays b. Zā'ūrā' (killed at Badr) and Qays b. al-Sukn of the B. al-Najjār, Muḥammad's maternal relation, whose work was dissipated: Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamhara*, 146.

¹⁴⁰ Watt (*Bell's Introduction*, 90) takes this to mean the combination of proclamations made and then repeated before Muḥammad, which may be one of the senses of the term which indicates a more deliberate scripturalisation effort.

¹⁴¹ Schoeler, *Charakter*, 27.

¹⁴² Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, s.v. 'asāṭīr'. See Bell, *Commentary*, 1.503, 535; 2.2.

varied considerably, or of the nature of the documentary Qur'ān or its modes of transmission.¹⁴³ Notoriously, we have the instance of 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ, who made what were later considered to be errors in recording what he heard from the Apostle, and concluded that Muḥammad did not quite know what he was talking about.¹⁴⁴

There is growing evidence, some indicated above, that the Qur'ānic text – this being understood as any portion of the text, each being *pars pro toto* – was transmitted in written form from early on. More or less full codices, individual *sūras*, groups of *sūras*, *muḥkam* and *mathānī*, are cases in point, at various stages of composition and with varying degrees of authoritativeness.¹⁴⁵ Chapters distinguished by sigla, or 'mysterious letters', are very likely to have been individual collections of *ṣuḥuf*; this would be indicated by the fact that those indicated with *alr'lalmr'lalm* and, to a lesser extent, *ḥm* and *ṭs/ṭsm* not only are grouped together in the canonical text, but are so despite breaking the principle of decreasing length, sometimes by very large coefficients of deviance.¹⁴⁶ One might also mention *al-musabbihāt* in this regard, and related issues arising from the order of the received text.¹⁴⁷

None of this implies or involves necessarily a singular controlling tradition of recitation,¹⁴⁸ which, as suggested, later fed back into written versions and fragments. The combination of the oral and the written evolved in tandem, the one feeding back into the other, and this is evident from the relative fragmentariness of the canonical text. Combined with abrogation,¹⁴⁹ all these indices together confirm the relative accuracy – mimetic approximation included – and a striving for scrupulous transmission. Indeed, the agreement between the various readings that later emerged, the *qirā'āt*, is 'stunning'.¹⁵⁰

One should not underestimate the preservation of documents in Muḥammad's milieu, the Constitution of Medina being a dramatic case in point,¹⁵¹ nor the availability of writing materials, ancient Qur'ānic writings upon some of which have been preserved.¹⁵² We have evidence from the

¹⁴³ Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 94.

¹⁴⁴ He fled Medina, and was condemned by the Prophet who eventually reprieved him after the conquest of Mecca: WAQ, 855 ff. On errors of memory, see the comments of Crapon, *Coran*, 402.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Epp, 'Multivalence', 269.

¹⁴⁶ Bauer, 'Anordnung', 7 f., 15, more recently noted by Reynolds, *Qur'ān*, 19, 19 nn. 68–9.

¹⁴⁷ Bauer, 'Anordnung', 15 n. 1, and *passim*. ¹⁴⁸ Donner, 'Qur'ān', 40.

¹⁴⁹ See especially Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 88 ff.

¹⁵⁰ Sadeghi and Bergmann, 'Codex', 379 and 379 ff. ¹⁵¹ Lecker, *Constitution*, 198 ff.

¹⁵² Maraqtan, 'Writing materials', 288 (parchment), 291 (leather), 292 f. (plants and wood), 295 (papyrus), 296 f. (cloth), 298 (shoulder blades – also found at Qaryat al-Fāw, written upon with red ink: al-Anṣārī, *Qaryat al-Fāw*, 15), 298 (ostraca), 299 (thin slabs of stone).

second half of the first Hijra century of distinctions in the way in which fragments of the text, and the text as a whole (without, for the moment, addressing the question of completeness or of the sealed canon), were read out and redacted, involving *riwāya* and *ʿard*,¹⁵³ including the possibility of reiterative recitation before Muḥammad himself¹⁵⁴ – most probably a reference to live reiteration assimilated in the literary sources to the modes of *riwāya* and *ʿard* that emerged later. And there are indications that, as the Qurʾānic text developed, there also developed among its immediate audience a synoptic habitus of familiarity whereby verses were seen in light of others.¹⁵⁵

Canonising pragmatics

The networks of transmission are difficult to disentangle in detail. The poetry of Ḥassān b. Thābit, which contains some Qurʾānic material, provides an index of the circulation of this material in a situation where the written text was not yet canonised in the literary sense, but was canonical both by exclusive attribution to Muḥammad and with reference to its redacted instances.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, Qurʾānic or para-Qurʾānic material circulating in the poetry of Umayya b. Abī al-Salt, Muḥammad's adversary in al-Ṭāʾif, bears witness to material in circulation whose ultimate provenance is difficult to determine and whose authority was dispersed prior to the recognition of the exclusive authority lodged in the redacted text.¹⁵⁷

Such material, uncontrolled in the sense of not having been copied from authoritative texts, was widespread, undeniably declaimed, but also, and crucially, not only written on parchment, papyrus and other materials available, but inscribed in stone, later on monumental inscriptions and also as graffiti, and on Umayyad coins, all of which display divergences.¹⁵⁸ Some

¹⁵³ GAS, 1.4. ¹⁵⁴ Al-ʿAynī, *ʿUmda*, 9.343, lines 11–13.

¹⁵⁵ Sinai, *Fortschreibung*, 83 and 86 ff., where the author considers this matter in terms of the Adam/Iblīs complex.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Ḥassān b. Thābit, *Diwān*, editor's Introduction, 4.

¹⁵⁷ It needs to be noted, with regard to Umayya, that it is highly unlikely that these passages could be taken to be pious yet fraudulent Medinan versifications of Muḥammad's enunciations. It is not only that pious Medinan fraudsters, should they actually exist, would have been more inclined to deny attributing such hallowed material to Umayya rather than to Muḥammad, but also that this material contains pagan elements, as noted a century ago by Frank-Kamenetzky, *Untersuchungen*, 5. See most recently the elaborated treatment of Sinai, 'Religious poetry'.

¹⁵⁸ Bell's famous hypothesis, accounting, in his view, for some characteristics of the received text relating to the sequences of utterances, that some portions were written on the backs of scraps of writing material (Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 101 ff.) is simplistic, and needs – in its assumption of written transmission – to be enhanced by a broader view of the process of collation and compilation.

of this material carried text corresponding to what was later to emerge as the *muṣḥaf* of 'Uthmān, which may well be considered to have been pre-'Uthmānic prior to its literary-canonical closure.¹⁵⁹ Others preserve traces of other, hitherto unknown redactions.¹⁶⁰ Some amalgamated fragments figured effectively as topical pericopes, and some had variants of wording if not of sense.¹⁶¹ A similar phenomenon, with precise quotations, variants and paraphrases, is encountered on tombstones, where formulae were only standardised around 790, but which show in certain areas a distinct movement from a freer use of the text to a more precisely 'Uthmānic expression.¹⁶² Similarly, a palimpsest from Ṣan'ā reveals variants of the exegetical type, betraying didactic purpose.¹⁶³

The history of the fragments just mentioned, and others like them in other media, is yet to be written, once a complete record of them, and of their variants, is compiled.¹⁶⁴ Yet such a history should not be treated as conceptually and historically separate from another which, albeit technically distinct, is part of the same historical phenomenon. This is the topic of Qur'ānic reading and written redaction on parchment and papyrus and other materials, and finally and in the fullness of time, on paper. There is evidence that, until at least late into the eighth century, grammarians were still quoting unusual Qur'ānic readings.¹⁶⁵ There is also evidence that, in a Syriac polemical manuscript of the middle of the fifteenth century, there are quotations from the Qur'ān in Syriac translation that exhibit verses not in harmony with the *textus receptus*, including verses to be found not in the Qur'ān, but in the *ḥadīth*.¹⁶⁶ These must be seen as being of a type with other fragments adjudged uncanonical once the literary canonic was constituted, not least in connection with variant readings, including variant

¹⁵⁹ Sadeghi and Bergmann, 'Codex', 383. ¹⁶⁰ Hilali, 'Palimpseste', 445.

¹⁶¹ Imbert, 'Coran', 382, 387, 389. This has been long recognised and studied: Abbott, 'Inscriptions', 191 f., an epigraphic text from Qaṣr Kharrānā which was republished and reread recently, along with other inscriptions from the same building (Imbert, 'Inscriptions'). For a thorough study of standard types of variants and errors by copyists and amanuenses (including auto-contamination), with reference to similar findings in studies of New Testament manuscripts, see Aland, *Text*, 282 ff., and see the use of such typologies by Sadeghi and Bergmann, 'Codex', 385 ff., 388 nn. 85, 86, 396, with references to similar types of variants in *ḥadīth* at 385, 386 n. 83. See also appendix 1. For broader perspectives on the nature of Qur'ānic variants, see Small, *Textual Criticism*, chs. 3–7.

¹⁶² Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 15 f., 21 ff., 24 f. ¹⁶³ Hilali, 'Palimpseste', 446 f.

¹⁶⁴ Imbert ('Coran', 389) refers to the epigraphic evidence as the 'lithographic Qur'ān'. A beginning has been made: Hoyland, 'Content and context'; Imbert, 'Coran'; Johns, 'Archaeology'.

¹⁶⁵ Carter, *Sibawayhi*, 42, and cf. Baalbaki, 'Qirā'at', 14 f.

¹⁶⁶ Mingana, 'Ancient', 189, 197 f., 206 f. The verses not in the Qur'ān concern the creation of the Pen and of the seven heavens and earths. Rezvan ('Mingana') attributes the preservation of these variants to erasures as the Qur'ānic Readings were canonised at the end of the tenth century.

readings by ‘Umar I,¹⁶⁷ and by many other companions of Muḥammad, some constituted into *maṣāḥif*, as we shall see presently.

To pose the question, therefore, as to whether a certain monumental or other fragment is or is not Qur’ānic, such as the famous inscription inside the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem,¹⁶⁸ seems to beg the question as to what the Qur’ān may have been, and to base judgement on a later criterion shaped by Muslim self-perception and an accomplished notion of the canon implicit in modern scholarship. Yet the Paleo-Muslim Qur’ān must be characterised not by criteria of accomplishment, but in terms of its process of formation, traces of which survived long thereafter. What we are dealing with is the circulation of material of canonical status, and thus fully Qur’ānic, prior to the establishment of a formal sealed literary canon, and the successful institution of its exclusive authority, which was a process long in the making.

There are a number of indices which enforce this argument, arising from the naming of Qur’ānic fragments in circulation which speak of the scripture’s earlier literary nature. It is reported that one battle-cry of Paleo-Muslims during the battles of Ḥunayn and of al-Yamāma invoked the *sūra* of the Cow, the warriors emboldening themselves by exclaiming ‘Yā aṣḥāb sūrat al-baqara’, quite possibly as much a protective talisman as a rallying-cry.¹⁶⁹ One could expect that battle-cries invoking other *sūras* existed. When the armies of ‘Alī faced those of Mu‘āwiya at Ṣiffin, on the right bank of the Euphrates near al-Raqqā in Syria in 37/657,¹⁷⁰ the *maṣāḥif* were invoked. These *maṣāḥif* are generally considered to be codices, but these were very few at the time, if at all present at the battle, and one needs to consider rather other forms of Qur’ānic presence, as fragments of the Word of God on parchment, papyrus, wood or animal shoulder blades. The report that ‘Uthmān read ‘the whole Qur’ān’ during one prostration¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 52, 59 – reading the canonical *al-qayyūm* (Q, 2.255, 3.2) as *al-qayyām* by both ‘Umar I and Ibn Mas‘ūd, according to the dialect of Ḥijāz. But the attribution of readings in particular dialects to particular individuals is a very involved issue, requiring detailed historical and phonetic investigation, and remains hypothetical. For instance, the same Ibn Mas‘ūd was reported to have been chided by ‘Umar I for using the word ‘*attā*’ instead of *ḥattā*’ in Q, 12.35, the former being in the dialect of Hudhayl (Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, § 1175).

¹⁶⁸ Johns, ‘Archaeology’, 429 and, more circumspectly, Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 62 ff. One must agree with Whelan, ‘Witness’, 13, that it stretches the bounds of credibility to suppose that such a very prominent monumental inscription would not have been preceded by a notion of a canonical text, to whatever degree it was definitively established.

¹⁶⁹ *US*, § 483; *WAQ*, 903; al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.63.

¹⁷⁰ A convenient summary of the state of the field, and of its historiographical aspects, can be found in ‘Ṣiffin’, *EL*.

¹⁷¹ Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 3.72.

might be seen as more than hyperbole, indicating that any and all fragments of the Qur'ānic text were Qur'ān. What must surely be inferred is that the Paleo-Muslim Qur'ān, or indeed the Paleo-Muslim *muṣḥaf*, designated any sort of collation of texts with Qur'ānic status, whereby any fragment or version was a synecdoche for the Book, for the whole phenomenon of revelation, as *pars pro toto*.¹⁷²

All references to *qirā'āt*, *ṣuḥuf* and *maṣāḥif* need to be seen in this light. The Paleo-Muslim Qur'ān acquired the status of scripture; this was what mattered. It is not so much that it was, to some, a source of teaching, belief or instruction, or a source of information overall, in an elementary way, that matters to the present analysis.¹⁷³ Instruction, warning, consolation, encouragement, justification and other sentiments were doubtless involved at certain points and contexts of delivery. It was only later elaborations that were to transform the delivery by the Qur'ān of keywords into a means of dogma and legislation – overall, the latter was to involve some 2.5 per cent of verses with tangible legal consequence, largely on matters of personal status.¹⁷⁴ It was beatific audition and benediction,¹⁷⁵ and its significance as an emblem of unity and of differentiation, that were primary. The rest was serviceable, of relevance at certain points of concrete application, but otherwise secondary. The Qur'ān was to be recited, not necessarily for the conveyance of information or instruction. What was remembered of it, when remembrance there was, would have been the resonances of sonority, diction, and, above all, a name that betokened divine presence. The Qur'ānic canon in scriptural formation was, above all, a performative phenomenon.

These uncertain developments notwithstanding, one can nevertheless proceed with trying to identify the emblematic pragmatic, oracular and authoritative status of the Qur'ān with reference to certain of its identifiable uses. It cannot be assumed, as is not infrequently the case, that, during the lifetime of Muḥammad and in the decades immediately thereafter, there had been available a notion of a sealed Scripture standing apart from its delivery and use, and it would be anachronistic to assume the availability of any notion of *sola scriptura*, despite the fact that the written redaction

¹⁷² Similarly, in a different context, with reference to the Bible in different linguistic media, a distinction has been proposed (Brock, *Bible*, 14 f.) between literary authenticity and scriptural authenticity, the former referring to exact wording and the latter to canonical status which can apply simultaneously to different literary forms.

¹⁷³ Cf. Sinai, *Fortschreibung*, 39. ¹⁷⁴ Sinai, *Fortschreibung*, 47 n. 90, 48 f.

¹⁷⁵ Sinai (*Fortschreibung*, 39) expresses this by the term 'sacramental effectivity', and speaks of the distinction between function and semantic extension (at 5).

of the Qur'ān as a *muṣḥaf* was in progress from early on. The notion of a sealed canon betokened an important conceptual shift yet to come.¹⁷⁶

The Book had talismanic use, from very early on: it is reported, for instance, that knowledge of *umm al-kitāb*, whatever the specific reference, guarded certain individuals from expropriation during a military campaign against Ḥismā led by Zayd b. Ḥāritha in AH 6.¹⁷⁷ In many ways, the Book, in whole or in fragments, had an apotropaic value comparable to icons, reflected in inscriptions of the Umayyad era.¹⁷⁸ It is in this light that one ought to regard the myriad emblematic references to the Qur'ān as the Book of God. Before the development of formal hermeneutical and jurisprudential disciplines of reading and of interpretation, and the Qur'ān was almost entirely a point of identification and mobilisation, and a token of habituation to novel conceptions. At Ṣifḥīn, arbitration was famously agreed once Qur'ānic *maṣāḥif* were hoisted atop lances, and the call was made to settle the dispute by reference to God or the Book of God and to His Apostle or His Apostle's example.¹⁷⁹ The question has been posed as to whether this implied that the Word of God was to be the arbiter, or that the two sides to the conflict really constituted one group whose emblem was the visible and lisible expression of God's word.¹⁸⁰ Clearly, there is little reason to assume that the technical means were available to opt for the former possibility,¹⁸¹ on an assumption that the *maṣāḥif* might be seen as a manual of negotiation. The Book of God and the Way of His Apostle were, and often continued to be, polemical and defensive notions, deployed symbolically and vaguely.¹⁸² In the case of Ṣifḥīn, it was clear that parties to the battle were calling for a truce in the name of God, not proposing that they pore over whatever fragments of text they had and labour over them exegetically or juridically to reach a singular solution that they might yield.

The claim that the Qur'ān served a predominantly indicative function is further signalled by other indices. Analogously to the situation at Ṣifḥīn,

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 47 f., and also the comments on the Khawārij by Sinai (*Fortschreibung*, 55). It is worth noting that, pragmatically, the notion of *sola scriptura* is, in practice, void: it offers a programme which is impossible to fulfil, as unadulterated literalism is a programmatic chimera, no matter how persistently announced. With regard to the Reformation, an exemplary instance, see the review of issues in Stierle, 'Schriftauslegung'.

¹⁷⁷ WAQ, 558. For a broad range of later uses, see the studies in Hamès, *Coran et talismans*.

¹⁷⁸ Khalek, *Damascus*, 131 n. 102.

¹⁷⁹ This episode, quite correctly qualified as 'obscure' (Ju'ayt, *al-Fitna*, 212), perhaps in the sense of not being self-evident, is often regarded as apocryphal, for no good reason, as noted by Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 597 n. 17.

¹⁸⁰ Hawting, *Dynasty*, 28.

¹⁸¹ In the same vein, it seems pointless to suggest that this is 'reminiscent' of Karaite–Rabbanite disputes over the status of scripture, and to dwell upon this, as in Hawting, 'Significance'.

¹⁸² Cf. the observations of Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 61 ff.

one might cite instances when various groups of people were accused of making false appeals to the Word of God – for instance, in AH 33, when Mu‘āwiya reported to ‘Uthmān that Kūfan malcontents were given to doing just this,¹⁸³ relying on the Word of God as an open source of authority without further specification. It must be borne in mind that the circulation of the Qur’ānic text was then still very limited. Written fragments, upon parchment or other materials, all of them called *maṣāḥif*, were held by a variety of hands, but the binding and integral codices were still being assembled, and, once assembled, were not widely circulated outside mosques. More will be said about this later. For the moment, a couple of further comments on the circulation of the Qur’ān will suffice.

The ‘Uthmānic codex was designed for lodging in mosques and for matinal reading, much like copies of the Gospels:¹⁸⁴ hallowed objects whose sanctity and contents were functions altogether distinct, albeit intersecting at specific points. Its sanctity performed magical functions, such as bearing witness to oaths or performing healing, protective, divinatory and supplicatory functions, including fragmentary use in epigraphy of the first Hijra century.¹⁸⁵ Knowledge by individuals of the Qur’ānic text *in toto* cannot be exaggerated. The text, written or oral, is likely to have been circulated fragmentarily, and there is little evidence that it was so well known as to become a special and familiar idiom that could then have made its way into contemporary poetry,¹⁸⁶ although such an idiom did exist and is reflected in epigraphy, indicating a fairly homogeneous elite and a real measure of control from the centre.¹⁸⁷

Moreover, recitation of the Qur’ān was, and still is, a devotional act rather than a commitment to comprehension or scholarship, displaying an element of virtuosity, and consisting of contact with a sanctified sonority and receipt of its charisma. Also hallowed objects were copies of the newer codex of al-Ḥajjāj, who was nevertheless the first ever to allow the Qur’ān to be recited outside ritual settings within mosques,¹⁸⁸ thus marking the

¹⁸³ TAB, 786.

¹⁸⁴ And most dramatically in the context of sacred/profane inversion where the sacred is as untouchable as the profane, the Torah, whose touch might defile hands: Stern, ‘Canonisation’, 232, and also 227 f.; Madigan, *Self-image*, 57 n. 9.

¹⁸⁵ Hoyland, ‘Content and context’, 79 ff., 83 ff., and *passim*. Similar points might be made about works of prophetic *ḥadīth* in later times, particularly those of Bukhārī and Muslim: Brown, *Canonization*, 338 ff. There is some literature on the pragmatic and particularly the magical uses of the Qur’ān, but no general study has come to my attention.

¹⁸⁶ Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 68 ff. ¹⁸⁷ Hoyland, ‘Content and context’, 91.

¹⁸⁸ Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, §§ 9 f. on this and the subsequent fortunes of al-Ḥajjāj’s *muṣḥaf*, and cf. TG, 1.46 and Hamdan, *Kanonisierung*, 173 n. 205.

beginning of the wider use of the whole Qur'ānic corpus, instead of reliance upon scattered fragments and upon what may have been retained in the memories of individuals. The very physical dimensions of the earliest existing Qur'ānic codices speak against the existence of plentiful copies and against any notion that they may have been for personal rather than institutional use.¹⁸⁹

It would not be an exaggeration to say that, with the uses of the Qur'ān mentioned above seemingly occurring *ab initio*, the canonisation of this particular Word of God preceded and did not follow the recognition of the canonical authority of the textually standardised *muṣḥaf*,¹⁹⁰ particularly if what we have in view is a sealed rather than an open canon *in statu nascendi*. A *muṣḥaf* means quite straightforwardly the written record of any topic,¹⁹¹ in many ways cognate with *ṣaḥīfa* (pl. *ṣuḥuf*), meaning both a text of documentary or contractual nature (as in the Constitution of Medina) or a written register in a very general sense (as in fragments of the Qur'ān circulating before the constitution of the canonical and other codices, the form clearly continuing to be in circulation thereafter). The transformation of the Word of God and of the Book into Scripture acquiring a sealed canonical nature was a process that involved the redaction by many hands of oral delivery by many voices, the acceptance, rejection and ultimately the intertextual assembly and sequential organisation, and, quite possibly, the editing of such redactions in a variety of codices, one of which ultimately became canonical, under the decisive direction of political agency. All the while, the Qur'ān, for the period preceding the sealing of its canon, and for longer fragmentarily, possessed the hallowed status of a canon in formation, and in this sense was used canonically before its integral canonisation. It is

¹⁸⁹ Déroche, 'Beauté', 23. A *muṣḥaf* preserved in Ṣan'ā', and very likely to date to the first Hijra century and quite possibly to have been commissioned by al-Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik, is composed of some 520 leaves of parchment, each measuring at least 51 × 47 cm., and is heavily illuminated (von Bothmer, 'Architecturbilder', 5, 15 f.). The E20 St Petersburg fragments, dated to the last quarter of the eighth century, measure 52.5 × 34 cm (Rezvan, *Qur'ān*, 60). The commodification of the Qur'ān and its wider distribution was a later phenomenon; on anecdotal evidence, it may have started in a very limited way in the Umayyad era (Cortese, 'Commodification', 53 ff.).

¹⁹⁰ *TG*, 1.34, and cf. Stern, 'Canonisation', 229, and Chapman, 'Biblical canon', 38, for most useful comparative indications. This process of canonisation seems to have been analogous to that of the Torah in many ways, both starting, *mutatis mutandis*, with an initial 'covenantal' context, proceeding to a written text not yet the object of study and reflection, then going on to the pedagogic Deuteronomical phase, and finally towards full self-referentiality and self-reflexivity, as discriminately sketched by Halbertal (*People*, 11 ff.) and, in somewhat different terms, by Chapman ('Biblical canon', 30 ff.). See in general Smith, 'Study', *passim*. In such comparisons, one must constantly bear in mind the distinction between the structural similarities indicated here, and the very different time spans involved, and guard against the Christian historical template generally adopted, implicitly, in studies of canonisation.

¹⁹¹ Al-Jāhiz, *Bighāl*, 19, and see 'Muṣḥaf', *EL*.

also important to realise that there are as many Qur'āns as there are codices, *ṣuḥuf*, readings and fragments, all equally canonical pragmatically and in view of reception and function, each being in itself an iconological *graphē* of the whole, albeit not in the view of technical literary criteria.

Making the literary canon

Fragments and registers of vox dei

The point being stressed, that all parts of the Qur'ān, separately and together, were the Qur'ān, and that this was its primary means of circulation, is lent further sustenance by another telling report which, in view of the present discussion, seems eminently plausible. Study of certain extant ancient Qur'ānic fragments suggests that different *sūras* may well have had different transmission histories,¹⁹² indicating separate histories of circulation. Further, we know that St John of Damascus and a seventh-century Mesopotamian monk from Bēth Ḥālē both attribute, to Muḥammad, a number of separate books: the Qur'ān, but also, distinctly, the *suwar* of the Cow, the Table and others, including, perhaps derisively, one called the she-camel of God, which does not occur as such in the canonical Qur'ān, though the legends of Ṣāliḥ and Thamūd involving such an animal do occur. Moreover, both authors suggest a somewhat different organisation of materials than that found in the canonical text.¹⁹³

The inference can only be that there were in circulation numerous fragments, *maṣāḥif*,¹⁹⁴ and that what we have was still nevertheless a canon whose components, whose sequence of components and whose integrality had not yet stabilised definitively, or rather that its stable 'Uthmānic canonical literary redaction had not yet become the sole point of reference and authority; references to the she-camel may well have involved a collection of chastisement pericopes relating to Thamūd. Part and whole were equally Qur'ān. Reference by St John to a scripture called Qur'ān needs to

¹⁹² Sadeghi and Bergmann, 'Codex', 404 n. 115.

¹⁹³ Sahas, *John of Damascus*, 90 ff.; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 465 ff., 480 ff., 489; and cf. de Prémare, *Coran*, 94 ff., 184 ff. and Griffith, 'Qur'ān', 205 f., 206 n. 8, who tries to reconstruct the monk's references to the *sūras* of *turb* and *gygy* as a misreading of *tauba* for the first, and a straightforward translation of *'ankabūt* (spider), through the Syriac *gwāḡay*, for the second. For his part, Khoury (*Théologiens*, 56 ff., 64) affirms the Damascene divine's knowledge of the Qur'ān, notwithstanding his haughty polemic, fantastic materials and occasionally hasty approach. Sahas ('Arab character', 188, 190) reminds us that that St John was an Arabophone who learnt Greek deliberately, a language his father did not speak.

¹⁹⁴ It is unnecessary to infer (de Prémare, *Coran*, 94) that there were then in circulation two distinct canons, one being specifically legal.

be understood generically in the sense discussed, to texts having canonical status performatively, without necessary specification of literary content, and irrespective of what may have been included or excluded from the 'Uthmānic Vulgate.

The Qur'ān is a text in which oral enunciations and variant reiterations thereof were registered, refracted through the medium of writing and through the editorial, linguistic and other desiderata of writing, including the relative formalisation of language, a formalisation which in turn tends to acquire dialectal inflection when orally pronounced, and when a written record is made of such reiteration.¹⁹⁵ This is attested by some of the Qur'ān's linguistic features. The very existence of deviations from standard Arabic are testimony to the integrity of what became the Vulgate in relation to its archetypes,¹⁹⁶ and the fact that the slight variations between different Readings are the exception rather than the rule shows that the model of purely oral transmission is highly unlikely.¹⁹⁷ As we have seen, there is a standard pattern for errors in transmission.¹⁹⁸

If the canon in process of scripturalisation was guaranteed by its performative function and underwritten by its transmission, its authority was later confirmed and reconfirmed by political authorities more durably instituted and with greater and geographically wider – ultimately, imperial – capacity for command. The traditional narratives of canonical composition are neither implausible nor improbable in their broad outlines, incomplete as they may be, and incoherent as they may be with regard to some detail.¹⁹⁹ These matters quite rightly put into question the seamlessness of the process as cast in Muslim traditions, and convey the impression that canonisation was a complex process.²⁰⁰ But they do not undermine the credibility of the overall picture.²⁰¹

Uncertainties in detail are only to be expected, and are the starting point rather than the end of the matter, given the complexity of the Paleo-Muslim Qur'ān. Forgetfulness, including forgetfulness on the part of the Apostle himself,²⁰² and the elimination of verses once canonical, are undeniable.²⁰³

¹⁹⁵ Blau ('Beginnings', § 5.2) cites the shortening of the long final /i/ and the omission of the short final /i/ as Meccan dialectal peculiarities.

¹⁹⁶ Blau, 'Beginnings', § 5. ¹⁹⁷ Sadeghi and Bergmann, 'Codex', 344. ¹⁹⁸ Above, note 161.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 44. Comerro, *Traditions*, is the fullest study of these to date.

²⁰⁰ These incongruities, historical as well as historiographical, are particularly well brought out by de Prémare, *Coran*, ch. 4.

²⁰¹ Gingerly and guardedly expressed, with awareness that hypercriticism has gone too far, the core narrative of Qur'ānic composition has been described as 'extremely probable': Schoeler, 'Codification', 789.

²⁰² Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 6.238 ff. ²⁰³ De Prémare, *Coran*, 85 f.; Jeffery, *Materials*, 209 ff.

This has long been noted,²⁰⁴ and it was indeed noted extensively in Muslim traditions.²⁰⁵ ‘Umar I was not able to insert a verse regarding the lapidation of fornicators because he was the only one able to remember the Prophet receiving such a revelation²⁰⁶ – it remained as a prophetic *ḥadīth*.²⁰⁷ The canonisation of ‘Uthmān’s codex involved much dispute about what was to be included or excluded.²⁰⁸

Khuzayma b. Thābit claimed that the redactors had left out what became Q, 9.128 f., which was duly inserted after ‘Uthmān himself had testified that it had indeed been sent by God, and its location in the relevant chapter was decided after deliberation. Other verses brought by the same person were also duly inserted.²⁰⁹ Earlier, ‘Umar I had accepted from the same Khuzayma other verses which were then incorporated at the end of *sūrat barā’al-al-anfāl*,²¹⁰ a chapter whose double name indicates disputes over its literary integrity or divisibility, noted in detail by Muslim traditions.²¹¹ The codex of Ubayy b. Ka’b contained two prayers, *al-ḥaḥḥ* and *al-khal’*, which do not exist in other redactions.²¹² Arguments for the unity of the

²⁰⁴ *GQ*, 1.245.

²⁰⁵ For instance, with regard to *sūrat al-aḥzāb*, which was said by ‘Ā’isha to have contained some 200 verses at the time of Muḥammad rather than the 33 remembered at the time of ‘Uthmān’s canonisation (al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 2.47), and which is said to have been considerably longer than *sūrat al-baqara*, before it was abbreviated, as the *sūrat al-baqara* itself was abbreviated (al-Sayyārī, *al-Qira’āt*, §§ 418–21, and the editors’ notes to § 418 – for other truncated *suwar*, nos. 24 (al-Nūr) and 49 (al-Ḥujurāt), recorded in a Shī’ite source, see *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays*, translated extracts in Amir-Moezzi, *Coran silencieux*, 51) – or which had been contained in *maṣāḥif* by then lost. On the charge that the ‘Uthmānic codex does not include ‘the integral Qur’ān’, and that it contains elements not originally belonging to it, see al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 1.81 ff.

²⁰⁶ Bell (*Commentary*, 1.549) considers that it is possible that such a verse stood in an earlier form in Q, 24.2, which specifies flogging for adulterers. Otherwise, it is usually thought to have been part of *sūrat al-aḥzāb* before its abbreviation (on which n. [204] above): al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, V.345, 346, al-Sayyārī, *al-Qira’āt*, § 421; *GQ*, 248 ff.; ‘Stoning’, *EQ*. The episode during which Muḥammad adjudged that a fornicating Jewish couple must be stoned rather than flogged and publicly humiliated, according to the Jewish practice of Medina, with appeal to the Torah whose judgement he asked the Jews involved to ascertain (*SIH*, 2.152 ff.), would imply that the scripturalism he was cultivating may have led him to compel the Jews to Judaise themselves more scripturally. There is no evidence of stoning as a punishment among the Arabs of the time.

²⁰⁷ TAB, 510; Cf. de Prémare, *Ta’is*, 355. It has been suggested that this episode was unlikely, as among some Arabs of the time forms of polyandry were practised (Watt, *Bell’s Introduction*, 55), to which might be added other practices which make adultery an unwieldy and inappropriate category. But of course this might be countered by the suggestion that Paleo-Muslims were embarked upon a decisive move to impose a certain degree of normative rationalisation.

²⁰⁸ See the review of the material in Modarresi, ‘Debates’, 10 f., and *passim*.

²⁰⁹ Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, §§ 1726 ff.

²¹⁰ Al-Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 30; Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, § 1769. On this person, see overall Comerro, *Traditions*, 81 ff.

²¹¹ For instance, al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 8.26.

²¹² *GQ*, 2.30 ff. One might well speculate about the reasons for the inclusion of that other prayer, the Fātiḥa, as the first chapter in the Qur’ānic corpus, this prayer not having the character of a *sūra*

two *sūras* Quraysh and al-Anfāl²¹³ will depend, not on thematic and other continuities, but on the character of literary composition discussed.

In all, we have the impression of a deliberate process of aggregative collation by ‘Umar I and ‘Uthmān, predominantly of written material probably already started under Abū Bakr, of various lengths and states of completion, written on a variety of materials, in addition to base autograph codices. The aim was evidently the production of a binding literary canon. For verification, such collations used the criterion of witness for inclusion or exclusion.²¹⁴ That texts presented required certification in this way, comparable to the requirement of verbal legal witness, need not entail Schoeler’s conclusion that there was a categorical mistrust of writing.²¹⁵ What it does imply, rather, and this is indeed what the sources bring out, is that there was a requirement of authenticating the integrity of a written record, held in private hands, by bearing witness to its provenance, and delivered to a commission of second-generation Paleo-Muslims commissioned by ‘Uthmān. There is nowhere the implication that the written medium was in itself a matter of doubt, for what was at issue was precisely the establishment of a literary canon, a record written down and, by consequence, authoritatively transmissible. The very existence of the Qur’ān as we have it is testimony to the salience of writing at the time, a salience not unrelated to a situation familiar with the composition and storage of documents.²¹⁶ Clearly, ‘Uthmān and ‘Umar I were as aware as Schoeler that orality does not necessarily imply inexactitude, and that writing in itself does not guarantee integrity.²¹⁷ It would be reasonable to imagine that this witnessing of Qur’ānic fragments involved not the control of the written text by an oral one, but rather the certification of provenance and occasion of receipt, of a prior act of transmission now in the process of reconfirmation, irrespective of the medium of transmission.

One might recall, in addition, well-known accounts of records of Qur’ānic text on parchment kept by two of Muḥammad’s wives, ‘Ā’isha and Ḥafṣa,²¹⁸ quite apart from the codices of Ibn Maṣ’ūd and other apostolic

(Gaudefroy-Demombynes, ‘Quelques noms’, 6) – not least, one might add, that it is not preceded by the imperative *qul*, as in the *mu’awwadhatān* and *sūrat al-Ikhlās*, the last three chapters in the canonical text, and some of the earliest chronologically.

²¹³ Shahid, ‘Two Qur’ānic sūras’, 429 f. ²¹⁴ Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, §§ 1165 ff.

²¹⁵ Schoeler, *Oral and Written*, 83 ff., where the author brings up supposed parallels with early Greek philosophy and with Judaism.

²¹⁶ Cf., in a different context, the suggestive discussion of Macdonald, ‘Literacy’, 63.

²¹⁷ Schoeler, *Charakter*, 9, and cf. Vansina, *Tradition*, 31 ff., 54 ff. Sawyer (*Sacred Languages*, 30) notes the impressive integrity over vast spans of time of similar texts, exemplified by the continuity between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the medieval Bible.

²¹⁸ Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, § 1722.

Companions. That there were many Qur'ānic fragments and autograph codices in circulation is beyond dispute, and it was indeed these that partly occasioned the attempts at codification by a political authority starting to formulate a religious policy in the medium of which Muḥammad's charisma might be transmitted.²¹⁹ There is nothing to justify doubts cast about a deliberate process of collation with a view to the constitution of a literary canon, or that this process started very soon after the death of the Prophet, building upon material available during his lifetime, some of it, as we have seen, deliberately scriptural in a variety of stages of preparation and completion. Arguments for a much later canonical redaction, or claims that the 'Uthmānic codex was an invention intended to justify later redactions, specifically under the Umayyads,²²⁰ are conjectures that have little justification, not least as the Qur'ān has none of the tell-tale signs of later composition, especially exuberant and triumphalist indications reflecting the afterglow of the Arab conquests,²²¹ and the text shows no attempt to harmonise the linguistic register or to tidy up sequence and content.

Recent research shows that the 'Uthmānic Vulgate of 644–650 is in fact an older text, and that study of certain other redactions do not so much capture the genesis of this text as much as represent its encroachment upon others.²²² The Umayyad reworking of the Qur'ānic canon constituted a technical advance within the bounds of the codex received from 'Uthmān, following an attempted collation left incomplete by the assassination of 'Umar I, and possibly also following a more embryonic and tentative attempt at producing a codex by his predecessor Abū Bakr.²²³ In addition,

²¹⁹ The two later standard accounts by al-Bukhārī and al-Ṭabarī, streamlining, pruning and deploying early accounts to produce seamless discourses of ideological moment relevant to the circumstances of their composition, are extremely well studied by Comorro, *Traditions*, chs. 1 and 2, with a synoptic summary at 197 ff. Yet, up to the fifth Hijri century, there was no consensus over this matter (*ibid.*, 56).

²²⁰ Casanova, *Mohammed*, 141 ff.

²²¹ None of the characteristics that Wansbrough detected in the Qur'ān necessitates postulating a late date for its literary canonisation. Donner (*Narratives*, 39 ff., 45 ff., 50) questions the cogency of the implications of Wansbrough's hypothesis, stressing the dramatic difference in content between Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, the fact that the former does not bring up the issue of leadership and succession to Muḥammad, crucial for *ḥadīth* and for later history, that it is devoid of obviously anachronistic references to people and events after the Apostle, and that its Biblicisms, especially those relating to the history of prophecy, betray slight knowledge.

²²² Sadeghi and Bergmann, 'Codex', 385, 392, 395, 398, 401 ff.

²²³ Al-Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 5. Modarresi ('Debates', 17 ff.) speaks of a 'suspicious' attempt not to credit the fourth successor of Muḥammad, 'Alī, with an attempted collation (on which see Comerro, *Traditions*, 172 ff. and Amir-Moezzi, *Coran silencieux*, 50 ff.), and there are reports that such an attempt may indeed have been made, receiving no acceptance during his turbulent tenure of the Caliphate (al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.135 f.). Shī'ī traditions, virtually all post-Umayyad, generally reject the idea that, this notwithstanding, the Qur'ān had been tampered with, with the exception of

there seem to have been three other families of pre-‘Uthmānic recensions, with many intersections.²²⁴

There are indications that the elements of this canon and its division into chapters are very early, and that verses were inserted into specific locations from a fairly early stage, indeed possibly from the time of the Prophet,²²⁵ bespeaking literary-editorial intent and, perhaps, the production of manageable collections. But there are also clear indications of disputes about the order and the names of the various chapters, differences which persisted well into Umayyad times in codices then proscribed,²²⁶ for which the ground was prepared by the obsolescence of certain redactions following the ‘Uthmānic.²²⁷ One might indeed seek to look closer into the various divisions of the Qur’ān, reflecting categories of texts and textual compilations in circulation,²²⁸ very likely to have been the content of the *ṣuḥuf* so often mentioned in the sources: into *umm al-kitāb*, *mathāni*, *suwar*, *al-sab‘ al-ṭiwāl* mentioned in a poem written during the reign of ‘Umar,²²⁹ or the *mi’ūn* (chapters with around 100 verses) immediately following the *al-sab‘ al-ṭiwāl*. One should mention here *sūras* (*sūras* 10–15, 26–8, 40–6), grouped together by opening with similar sigla or ‘Mysterious Letters’, blocks of *sūras* for the accommodation of which the arrangement of *sūras* by decreasing length was relaxed.²³⁰ Of these last, the *ḥawāmīm* (starting with *ḥm*) form a distinct group (*sūras* 40–6) adjacent in the canonical redaction, referring to each other, containing identical formulae, recasting common germinal ideas and thematically complementary.²³¹ Much the same might be said about other chapters put together in the Qur’ānic codices out of order of length, but clearly grouped together under sigla,

the arrangement of certain *sūras* (*ibid.*, 28 ff.). A suspicion among the Shī‘a that the Qur’ān was somehow incomplete persisted until the mid tenth century, and Shī‘ī scholars did suggest certain minor changes in word order and vocalisation. However, this stream of scholarship did preserve certain variants and suggest certain interpolations, driven by doctrinal exigencies, mainly matters relating to ‘Alī and his descendants, and to the question of *mut‘a* marriage: Bar-Asher, ‘Readings’, 41, 43, 44 ff. The major work is the *Kitāb al-Qira’āt* of al-Sayyārī, who was active in the middle of the ninth century, on which see Amir-Moezzi, *Coran silencieux*, 89 ff.

²²⁴ *GQ*, 2.8 ff., 29, 30 ff. See, most recently, Sadeghi and Bergmann, ‘Codex’, 368 ff., 395 ff. and, somewhat earlier, Cook, ‘Stemma’, 103 f., and *passim*.

²²⁵ Al-Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 31. See Small, *Textual Criticism*, 89, for codicological indications.

²²⁶ Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, § 1772; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.168 ff.; 215 ff.; al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.33 f.; 135 f.; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 1.59 f.

²²⁷ Sadeghi and Bergmann, ‘Codex’, 370 f.

²²⁸ Khan, *Exegetischen Teile*, 132 f.; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.177 ff.

²²⁹ Along with the *sūra* of Light: Farrukh, *Frühislam*, 101 f.

²³⁰ Watt, *Bell’s Introduction*, 62. Thus we have the *ḥawāmīm*, opening with *h/m* alone or in combination with other letters, another group opening with *a/l/r*, together forming a group, sometimes with others in which the *mīm* was added, and others with *ṭ/s* and *ṭ/s/m*. On the controversial matters of these letters, see *ibid.*, 64 f. and ‘Mysterious letters’, *EQ*. That these Mysterious Letters may have functioned as glossolalia (Hoffmann, *Poetic Qur’ān*, 102 ff.) is unlikely.

²³¹ Dayeh, ‘Al-Ḥawāmīm’, 462 f., 471 ff., 478 ff.

especially *alml'alr almr* and *ṭsm/ṭs*.²³² Together with these, mention might be made of other terms designating groups of chapters, which are also likely to have been self-contained *ṣuḥuf* or even *maṣāḥif*, such as the *mumtaḥināt* and the *musabbihāt*.²³³

One will need to inquire into whether these might not be brought into relation to the dispersal of Qur'ānic material mentioned throughout the present discussion, and look into the possibility that there existed various written collations such as these, whose unity may be literary or functional, singly or in combination. One will also need to consider whether these formed independent literary collations, later collected into comprehensive codices: it is interesting to note that in the version of Ibn Mas'ūd, an editorial attempt had actually been made to smooth over irregularities in length (with the *alml'alr* chapters put where they would belong ideally), without this affecting the *ḥm* block of chapters, prompting the possible inference that the latter had been canonised earlier.²³⁴

As suggested, chapter and verse divisions of the Qur'ān's literary canon appear to be quite early, and are likely to have been Muḥammadan,²³⁵ although, given the above, the sequential arrangement of chapters in a codex by decreasing length may have intervened only later, at the level of comprehensive collation, as a formal organising principle, without this necessarily excluding the possibility that this idea pre-dated Muḥammad's death. Based on the frequency of sigla in the various chronological layers of the canonical Qur'ān, it would appear that these occur with increasing frequency during the Meccan period, indicating growing redactional and collational effort.²³⁶ The term *sūra* occurs in the text ten times, designating an unspecified portion of the text, and is probably late in the history of revelation,²³⁷ very likely reflecting the emergence and growth of deliberately redactional activity and literary intent. Their titles are clearly catchwords and means of identification, and convey no special theological or text-historical stresses (abrogated fragments often succeed their replacements in the textual order), but they do convey an awareness of achieved canonical status.²³⁸ Their (imperfect) arrangement by decreasing length²³⁹ bespeaks the notion of canon as a list mentioned above; one may consider the similar case

²³² On this phenomenon, see especially Bauer, 'Anordnung', 7 f., and *passim*.

²³³ Bauer, 'Anordnung', 16. ²³⁴ Bauer, 'Anordnung', 11. ²³⁵ Cf. Bell, *Origins*, 52.

²³⁶ Bauer, 'Anordnung', 20: one chapter out of forty-eight in the first Meccan period, about half of all *sūras* in the second Meccan period, two-thirds of all chapters in the last Meccan period – but only two out of twenty-four in the Medinan period, which would betoken a new approach to redaction.

²³⁷ 'Sūra(s)', *EQ*, 5.167.

²³⁸ Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 59 (who cites a similar procedure in Mark 12.26 and Luke 20.37, where Exodus 3 is referred to as The Bush); 'Sūra(s)', *EQ*, 5.167.

²³⁹ *GQ*, 2.11 ff.

of Paul's Letters as they appear in the New Testament. Variant readings, whatever their chronology, display differences and leaps in the sequence of *sūras*,²⁴⁰ indicating an unstable earlier arrangement and the multiplicity of such arrangements.

In all, and for all that has been said about the phenomenon of disorganisation, the literary canon of the Qur'ān, especially the compositional characteristics of verses and of sequences of verses, sometimes betrays a deliberate artfulness as verses are arranged in redactional sequence, with the addition of assonances to aid the acoustic flow of relevant passages. It also betrays the use of standard Arabic rhetorical devices,²⁴¹ and deploys plentifully the modes of discourse of earlier Arabic oratory, and of course of vatic speech.²⁴² Verses are the constitutive cells of the Qur'ān that are likely to reflect primary delivery and the basic compositional elements, and appear clearly very early indeed as self-contained units.²⁴³ Deliberate sustained composition can be claimed only for certain parts of the Qur'ān, most notably the *sūra* of Joseph. Discursive, thematic and narrative coherence, where it exists, is either confined to smaller sequences of verses, or else a redactional and self-reflexive phenomenon during the lifetime of Muḥammad or shortly thereafter, cumulatively acquired through the feedback loop of composition.

But the structure of chapters, old as it is, does not display a compelling compositional coherence overall, despite evidence of coherence in some of its parts: abrupt changes of rhyme, repetition of rhyme-words in adjoining

²⁴⁰ For instance, in the Ṣan'ā fragments, some portions of which are close to the Ibn Mas'ūd and Ubayy b. Ka'b variants recorded in the sources, but display other leaps as well (from 72 to 51, from 67 to 83) which are not recorded elsewhere, and which may convey a wider variation in chapter order than hitherto supposed. See Puin, 'Observations', III. On the other hand, we also find in Ṣan'ā the first and last *sūras* of the 'Uthmānic codex, excluded from the other codices (von Bothmer and Puin, 'Neue Wege', 45 f.). In all, *qirā'āt* literature reports thirty-eight *sūras* without differences, ten with a single disputed division; *sūra* 20 stands out with twenty disputed divisions. The density of disputed points is greater in the shorter *sūras*. See Sadeghi and Bergmann, 'Codex', 377.

²⁴¹ Rhyming has been discussed in a variety of contexts above, but one might also add didactic forms (Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 75 ff.): these may be asseverative, dramatic, metaphorical or parables. For polemical and apologetic devices, see 'Provocation', *EQ*. One might also mention the use of connectives and rectifications (Larcher, 'Coran', 454 f.), and of apotaxis, prodis and chiasmus: Larcher, 'Coran', 456; Cuypers, 'Structures', III ff. (considering material from *sūras* 1, 12, 91 and 101, and confirming the conclusions of Crapon. See also Beeston, 'Parallelism', 145 and *passim*, and cf. Cuypers, 'Structures', 109, on the chiasmus, a variant of parallelism, as a Semitic phrase-structure, who indicates controversies in scholarship over this point regarding Joseph, a Qur'ānic chapter which seems to have become a small industry.

²⁴² See Jones, 'Language', *passim*, who proposes (at 32) that the advent of the Qur'ān was catastrophic for the record of earlier vatic and oratorical discourse.

²⁴³ This is reflected in the earliest manuscript evidence. See A'zamī, *History*, 100 ff., and Déroche, *Transmission*, 136.

phrases, intrusion of subjects unrelated to an otherwise homogeneous passage, breaks in grammatical construction, abrupt changes in the length of verses, sudden changes in dramatic situations, pronominal shifts, the juxtaposition of seemingly contrary statements, the intrusion of later phrases into earlier ones.²⁴⁴ These and other features betray the acts of original constitution of chapters as one of paratactic textual agglomeration under ad hoc conditions. They bear testimony to the argument made above, that what mattered was the existence of a scripture, to which coherence was auxiliary. Once accomplished, this was signalled by the Qur'ān swearing by itself.²⁴⁵

But whatever departure there was in the order of *sūras* from that of the 'Uthmānic codex, the matter hardly bears over-interpretation, as the sequences of verses in individual chapters within each Reading is uniform,²⁴⁶ which bespeaks a greater degree of overall uniformity and stability by the time of the 'Uthmānic redaction than is sometimes admitted. And, unlike chapter division, verse divisions in the Qur'ān are by no means arbitrary, or subject to the accidents of compilation, but reflect divisions marked by rhythm or assonance;²⁴⁷ their internal sequences are generally uniform across all Readings. On this account alone, they need to be regarded as very early indeed, and probably reflect blocks of original delivery, reiteration and redaction.

There are some variations in the text of what became the opening chapter,²⁴⁸ and disagreements as to whether it, and the opening invocation (*al-basmala*), should have been included in the canon at all.²⁴⁹ And there are, finally, *maṣāḥif* which were progressively discarded as the canon was being established. 'Uthmān is accused of having burnt portions he had discarded, but there are other, pious reports that he had had them torn up or buried under the *minbar* of the Prophet in Medina, without adverse comment.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁴ Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 90 ff. Most recently, a systematic argument for coherence has been made by Sinai, *Heilige Schrift*, 54 ff.

²⁴⁵ For this phenomenon, *GQ*, 1.20.

²⁴⁶ A'zamī, *History*, 72. ²⁴⁷ Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 60.

²⁴⁸ Jeffery, 'Variant', *passim*, though there seems to be no justification for the conclusion that this resulted from oral transmission, rather than from variant deliveries and registers.

²⁴⁹ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 1.91 ff. The *basmala*, in complete and incomplete forms, occurs as a component in the lithographic and numismatic Qur'āns: Ghabban, 'Inscription', 212. But the use of such incomplete forms as exist lithographically and numismatically for dating inscriptions is inconsistent with the appearance of both its complete and incomplete forms from a very early period, in the famous Ahnas papyrus of AH 22 (I am grateful to M. Macdonald for bringing this matter to my attention in a private communication).

²⁵⁰ Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, §§ 1731 ff.

Very early variants were to persist after the ‘Uthmānic codex, and doubtless others accruing from noise and contamination,²⁵¹ not least given the relationship between sound and script, as we shall see, and the fact that Arabic orthography had not stabilised as yet, even within the canonical skeletal-morphemic *rasm*.²⁵² The ‘Uthmānic codex differed from others in circulation – most notably those of Ibn Mas‘ūd circulating in al-Kūfa, of Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī in Baṣra, and of Ubayy b. Ka‘b in Syria, and their derivatives or variants – in a number of respects. These related mainly to specific readings and variants of broader scope, the two being considered as both graphic and acoustic. They differed in the order and naming of chapters and in the inclusion or exclusion of *al-mu‘awwadhatān* and the opening chapter.²⁵³ Variants, including minor variant readings of the same verses, were both involved in the process of redaction, not only the redaction of the canon and its variants, but also the interconnection of the oral and the written involved within both of these operations.

Fragmentation and redaction

It has been suggested cogently that readings of the Qur’ān, even the earliest, reflected a certain linguistic elaboration of the material to be read, an elaboration that was later to form part of grammatical discourse navigating the *Urwald* of ‘Arabiyya.²⁵⁴ Clearly, the transition between the delivery of revelation and its redaction, on to its graphic standardisation (*rasm*) and further on to its latter enunciation (*qirā‘a*) traversed not only various media, but also linguistic conventions. It is therefore entirely unsurprising that variant readings, the *qirā‘āt*, became an issue in canonisation, one that was to take on a more formal aspect later, with the standardisation of Arabic linguistic norms in which dialects figured as constructed elements of grammar, morphology and the lexicon, not entirely hypothetical but with varying degrees of proximity to linguistic reality. One would need to consider the seven *ahruf* of Qur’ānic redaction, or the seven canonical modes or possibilities of reading, as resulting from later linguistic systematisation of and reflection upon the Paleo-Muslim canon and the different renditions made possible by this canon. Likewise, later inventories of dialectal presence within the Qur’ānic text need to be so considered.²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ Sadeghi and Bergmann, ‘Codex’, 370.

²⁵² See Déroche, *Transmission*, 163 ff.

²⁵³ Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, §§ 1751, 1754.

²⁵⁴ Beck, ‘Arabiyya’, 181 f., 188.

²⁵⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.153 ff., 469 ff.: *ahruf* has a wide variety of meanings in use (at least thirty-five, according to one count), ranging from autograph codices to different dialects to the seven canonical versions. See ‘Readings of the Qur’ān’, *EQ*.

In most cases, the readings concerned vocabulary, vocalisation, articulation, orthography²⁵⁶ and related features,²⁵⁷ but also textual variants more broadly conceived.²⁵⁸ According to one strand of Muslim narratives, the 'Uthmānic redaction was occasioned by disagreements between the Syrians, the Kūfians and the Baṣrans about the readings of the holy text, as a result of which the Caliph assembled a group of persons who used an extant *muṣḥaf*, brought together other materials, and called upon the help of persons who had received the text from the Prophet. They produced what was to become the canonical literary redaction, duly copied and sent out to the various areas of Arab presence in Iraq, Syria and Egypt.²⁵⁹

Whatever the facts it would be reasonable to assume that this process of standardising redaction, based on collations held by 'Ā'isha and Ḥaḥṣa, involved steps similar to those already encountered above, including the bearing of witness to fragments to be adopted and other means of achieving and demonstrating Medinan consensus, such as the burning before Muḥammad's companions of discarded portions.²⁶⁰ True or not, this is an indication of demonstrative consensus about the will of the Caliph, and about the process of achieving standardisation.

In all, the constitution of the 'Uthmānic canon involved the incorporation of portions that could be witnessed as having been heard from the Prophet.²⁶¹ It involved standardising written redaction, and inevitable disputes arose concerning who was to be entrusted with the final redaction. There are various reports of the constitution of a committee, of personal resentments and antipathies, of considerations concerning the idiom to be used in the final redaction. But in all, the commissioning of Zayd b. Thābit by 'Uthmān would seem to be the most verisimilar.²⁶²

Clearly, personal and in-group dynamics and disputes are not unrelated to the language of 'Uthmān's *muṣḥaf*. This is an involved issue, then as now, and 'Uthmān himself had recognised this difficulty, reportedly asserting

²⁵⁶ For instance, *qrn* for *qur'ān* at Q, 50.1 in a St Petersburg fragment. See Small, *Textual Scholarship*, ch. 3.

²⁵⁷ Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl*, 28 f., for a crisp systematic typology, and Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, for details of later exegetical possibilities. See the comments of Neuwirth, 'Qur'ān', 110.

²⁵⁸ For instance, *al-riyāḥ*^{al-u} *musakbkhara*^{in/un} *bi-amr*^{il} for 16.12, *wa sakbkhara*^u *lakum*^u *l-layl*^u *wa'n-nahār*^u: Sufyān al-Thawrī, *Tafsīr*, 122.

²⁵⁹ Sayf b. 'Umar, *al-Jamal*, §§ 51 ff.; Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, §§ 1711 ff.

²⁶⁰ Sayf b. 'Umar, *al-Jamal*, § 52 – thus the later, somewhat pietistic view, that 'Uthmān thereby restored the unity of a text that had originally been singular, had been revealed by One, but had become several books: TAB, 794.

²⁶¹ Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, § 1718; al-Sijistānī, *Maṣāḥif*, 14 ff.

²⁶² Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, §§ 1740, 1742, 1748, 1767 f.; al-Sijistānī, *Maṣāḥif*, 20, 24. See especially the analyses of Comerro, *Traditions*, 51 ff., 63 ff.

that the Qur'an does indeed contain linguistic infelicities, *lahn*, which the Arabs, he trusted, will rectify according to their various dialects,²⁶³ a statement displaying full awareness of the feedbacks and interfaces discussed above, and prefiguring developments to come²⁶⁴ – it is significant that recent study reveals the probability that the traditions of reading according to seven modes go back to the late first century of the Hijra, reflecting the early elaboration of practices in place. The purpose of the 'Uthmānic codex was to establish a standard skeletal-morphemic *rasm*, or consonantal text, which was as such open to a variety of possible readings.²⁶⁵ In this sense, the 'sealing' of the canon takes on a more supple aspect than is usually assumed.

It would not be unreasonable to accept reports of 'Uthmān's keenness to limit disagreement about Qur'anic readings, provided that we relate this to an emergent religious policy seeking coherence, and provided we lend more emphasis to a decision to fix a canon than one aimed at limiting the possibilities of its reading. Also to be considered are the technical orthographic means available, and indeed the diverse state of the Arabic usage prior to the formal construction of 'Arabiyya, which was such as to preclude the possibility of verbally enunciative uniformity for a period of some two centuries. It was only in the tenth century that matters had developed to a state where all *maṣāḥif* acquired complete phonetic notation as standard,²⁶⁶ and one must look at these, not as reflecting an original standard Arabic, but as elaborations driven by the then formally constituted formal 'Arabiyya. What 'Uthmān did accomplish was to provide a template of visual identity to traditions of enunciation already in place, some of which were to persist for some centuries thereafter, the visual identity of a hallowed object.²⁶⁷

²⁶³ Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, §§ 1762 f.

²⁶⁴ See Small, *Textual Criticism*, 168 and Nasser, *Transmission*, 18 ff.

²⁶⁵ See Sadeghi and Bergmann, 'Codex', 373, 374 table 5. It would appear that to maintain that there reigned in this context a state of orthographic *Regellosigkeit* (Beck, 'Kodex', 368), this proposition having been put forward before the recent advances in early Arabic codicology and paleography, is much exaggerated, even if one agrees that 'to put it bluntly, the paleography of Arabic scripts remains two centuries behind work done on Latin and Greek manuscripts' (Déroche, *Codicology*, 210).

²⁶⁶ Déroche, *Coran*, 79 f., a development that took place in terms of the canons established for 'Arabiyya, as noted by Beck, 'Arabiyya', 188 ff.

²⁶⁷ Déroche, *Transmission*, 165. It might helpfully be noted that the Masoretic text of the Old Testament, established between the seventh and tenth centuries, and including the insertion of semivowels, syllabic closures, 'hurried' (*hateph*) vowels and stress accents, along with adjustments of a dogmatic and theological character (such as the removal or adjustment of unseemly or overly anthropomorphic statements and the substitution of Elohim for Yahweh in some passages) reflects a parallel development.

Before that, and not least at the time the 'Uthmānic text was established, matters were more fluid, albeit not entirely open. The interplay of *rasm* and *qirā'a* was such that, as suggested, they complemented one another, not in a tight fit, but according to a variety of situational inflections, including dialectal ones and, one might add, within those, local accentuations that one would expect as well. It is perhaps not too much of an exaggeration to maintain that the written text could only be read properly by persons who knew it already,²⁶⁸ after their own fashion, and there are indicators that in Umayyad times texts were read 'correctly' even though they still displayed some orthographic variation²⁶⁹ – correct reading, one would presume, being understood as a reading conforming to expectations, however conditioned, and, one would add, conducted through a polydialectal 'vehicular Arabic' as it developed,²⁷⁰ one which, we saw, pre-dated Paleo-Islam. It has already been suggested that even dialectal features are filtered through as they get to be written down.

The limits of standardisation

The 'Uthmānic codex therefore set a trail, but provided no definitive solution to the vexed question of the relationship between writing and verbal enunciation, a relationship that involves translation between media, bringing into play socio-linguistic factors as well as technical factors of orthography. The decision to adopt a *rasm* devoid of dots that might facilitate vocalisation (*raqsh*) – dots whose use at the time is in evidence and with such evidence accumulating at great speed in the past few years – suggests a deliberate choice to remove dots, as was recently proposed,²⁷¹ to relax restraints upon reading, one would presume, in line with 'Uthmān's statement above. A definitive description of this situation still awaits detailed mapping, but a number of important matters can be highlighted nevertheless, building upon epigraphic considerations.

The vocalisation of a consonantal text, the *rasm*, had long been conceived as an undertaking distinct from the basic *rasm*, the graphic register.²⁷² Variations in reading were sometimes but by no means invariably related to the graphic register, as illustrated by the Ṣan'ā' Qur'ānic parchments.²⁷³ In view

²⁶⁸ Déroche, *Coran*, 78 f.

²⁶⁹ Hamdan, *Koranisierung*, 254 f., with reference to Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, and cf. Beck, 'Kodex', 356 ff.

²⁷⁰ Larcher, 'Coran', 445. ²⁷¹ Al-Ghabbān, 'Evolution', 95.

²⁷² Sawyer, *Sacred Languages*, 57, indicating the distinction in Aramaic between *ketib* and *qere* with reference to Bible vocalisation around the fourth or fifth centuries.

²⁷³ Puin, 'Observations', 109.

of the remarks just made on the relationship between reading and writing, and of the fact that we are dealing with scribes who might be termed professionals and the limited scale of the public, it is hardly surprising that the dotting of letters in the graphic redaction was in the early period rarely added to specify ambiguous *rasm* better, or indeed to distinguish homographic consonants,²⁷⁴ as distinct from pointing meant to mark affixes and thus define grammatical categories, and to help with the choice of certain categories of individual words, especially some prepositions.²⁷⁵

Pointing, *raqsh*,²⁷⁶ had been available from a very early period, with physical evidence from papyri (AH 22) and inscriptions (AH 24), pre-dating the reign of 'Uthmān,²⁷⁷ and very likely pre-Muḥammadan as well.²⁷⁸ The extent to which diacritical notation (*tashkīl*) existed at all, as distinct from skeletal notation distinguishing homographic consonants (*i'jām*), is unknown; evidence of the latter goes back to an inscription on a tombstone dated AD 276 in the region of Madā'in Šālīḥ.²⁷⁹ Considering that in the earliest extant manuscripts, with some exceptions, diacritical marks were not distinguished by colour or ink from the letters to which they were applied, the point has been made that they were considered to be an integral part of the script.²⁸⁰

Clearly, the common view of the Arabic of the Paleo-Muslim period as a *scriptio defectiva* without further qualification needs to be revised.²⁸¹ Diacritical notation appearing in some of the earliest extant Qur'ānic manuscripts (second half of first Hijra century) was inconsistent, and depended on conventions which may have been specific to individual scribes, but may also have been the result of graphic conventions whose history is unclear. The point has been made that, at the time of the 'Uthmānic codex, orthographic transformation was largely the developing work of individual copyists.²⁸² But in all cases, with regard to the Ḥijāzī script in which these manuscripts are written, these variations were all based on a common graphic denominator.²⁸³ This common denominator

²⁷⁴ Robin, 'Réforme', 339. ²⁷⁵ Kaplony, 'Dots', 92 f., 100, somewhat inconclusively.

²⁷⁶ 'r-q-sh', *LA*; al-Asad, *Maṣādir*, 34 ff.; al-Ghabbān, 'Evolution', 91, 93.

²⁷⁷ Abbott, *North Arabic Script*, 18, 39; Robin, 'Réforme', 343 f.; Ghabban, 'Inscription', 218, 225 ff.

²⁷⁸ Robin, 'Réforme', 320, 339 f., 341 ff., for technical details. See Grohmann, *Paläographie*, 1.57 f., and inscriptions cited in A'zamī, *History*, 137 f. and figs. 10.2, 10.3, 10.4.

²⁷⁹ Healey and Smith, 'Jaussen-Savignac 17', 77 – skeletal dots on the *dhāl*, *rā'* and *shīn*.

²⁸⁰ Déroche, *Codicology*, 220. The Codex Parisono-Petropolitanus (BNF Arabe 328, Vat. Ar. 1605[I], Khalilī KfQ60) has been studied in great detail in Déroche, *Transmission*, where the codicology and orthography are examined in chs. 2 and 3, and BNF Arabe 328 published in facsimile.

²⁸¹ Cf. Ghabban, 'Inscription', 233. ²⁸² Déroche, *Transmission*, 168.

²⁸³ Déroche, *Catalogue*, 35 ff.; *Codicology*, 216 f. Déroche (*Transmission*, 117) regards common visual identity as primary, and revises an earlier suggestion made by him that the Ḥijāz script might be

was common not only to Qur'ānic manuscripts, but also to papyri and other media as well, showing common graphic features.²⁸⁴

The 'defectiveness' of script, which might perhaps better be described as incompleteness, does result in a number of uncertainties, if one were to assume that writing was then conceivable without the pragmatic instantiation of its reading. By AH 22, in the Ahnas papyrus, diacritical marks seem to have displayed a codified system,²⁸⁵ which would give sustenance to the thesis recently proposed by Robin in a cogent and elaborate form, that the Medinan Caliphate witnessed a deliberate reform of writing convention, possibly after the example of the court at al-Ḥīra.²⁸⁶ This reform, it has been suggested, is probably reflected in early Qur'ānic manuscripts,²⁸⁷ in the style illustrated by Figure 4. In terms of orthography, this Ḥijāzī script may be seen to have combined features of the squareness of the script attributed to al-Ḥīra with the more rounded features of writing at al-Anbār, producing *al-tā'im*.²⁸⁸

Clearly, this Medinan reform sought standardisation, a standardisation not restricted to the *rasm* of the Qur'ān, which was able to provide a consensual redaction of the Word of God in as exacting a form as possible.²⁸⁹ This did not preclude morphological and grammatical ambiguities, some with and some without consequence to meaning,²⁹⁰ nor did it give special notation to short vowels, which was to come later.²⁹¹ But it was nonetheless one that was controllable by the speakers and audiences for whom it was intended; to emergent political institutionalisation corresponded emergent graphic forms of the Qur'ān, canonised as a process of communication prior to its definitive literary canonisation, first as a *ne varietur* graphic redaction in principle, later as what was in principle a *ne varietur* set of readings.

Of course, the redaction of the 'Uthmānic *rasm* had to be expressed in a specific linguistic medium, which was not necessarily that of its original delivery. Preference for the dialect of Quraysh, however hypothetical its construal, has already been mentioned, but this is of course the beginning

divided into sub-categories, beyond the variations accruing from individual scribes, all inclining the *alif* using vertical elongation (*mash*), and writing the final or isolated *kāf*.

²⁸⁴ Not least the tendency to point homographic consonants, a new value to the *alif* indicating *ā* in all positions, and the emergence of the *tā' marbūṭa* indicating *h*. See Déroche, *Livre*, 18 f.; Robin, 'Réforme', 322 ff., 341, 342 ff. The earliest evidence for the medial *alif* comes from the Ahnas papyrus of 22/643: al-Ghabbān, 'Evolution', 96.

²⁸⁵ Robin, 'Réforme', 351.

²⁸⁶ Robin, 'Réforme', 322, 342. One might consider a Syrian script called *jazm*, also in connection with al-Ḥīra (Khouri, 'Papyruskunde', 263 f.), and see Abbott, *Rise*, 10 ff., 22 ff.

²⁸⁷ Déroche, *Transmission*, 162. ²⁸⁸ Al-Ghabbān, 'Evolution', 95.

²⁸⁹ Déroche, *Livre*, 20; 'Beauté', 22. ²⁹⁰ Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl*, 28. ²⁹¹ Déroche, *Livre*, 20.

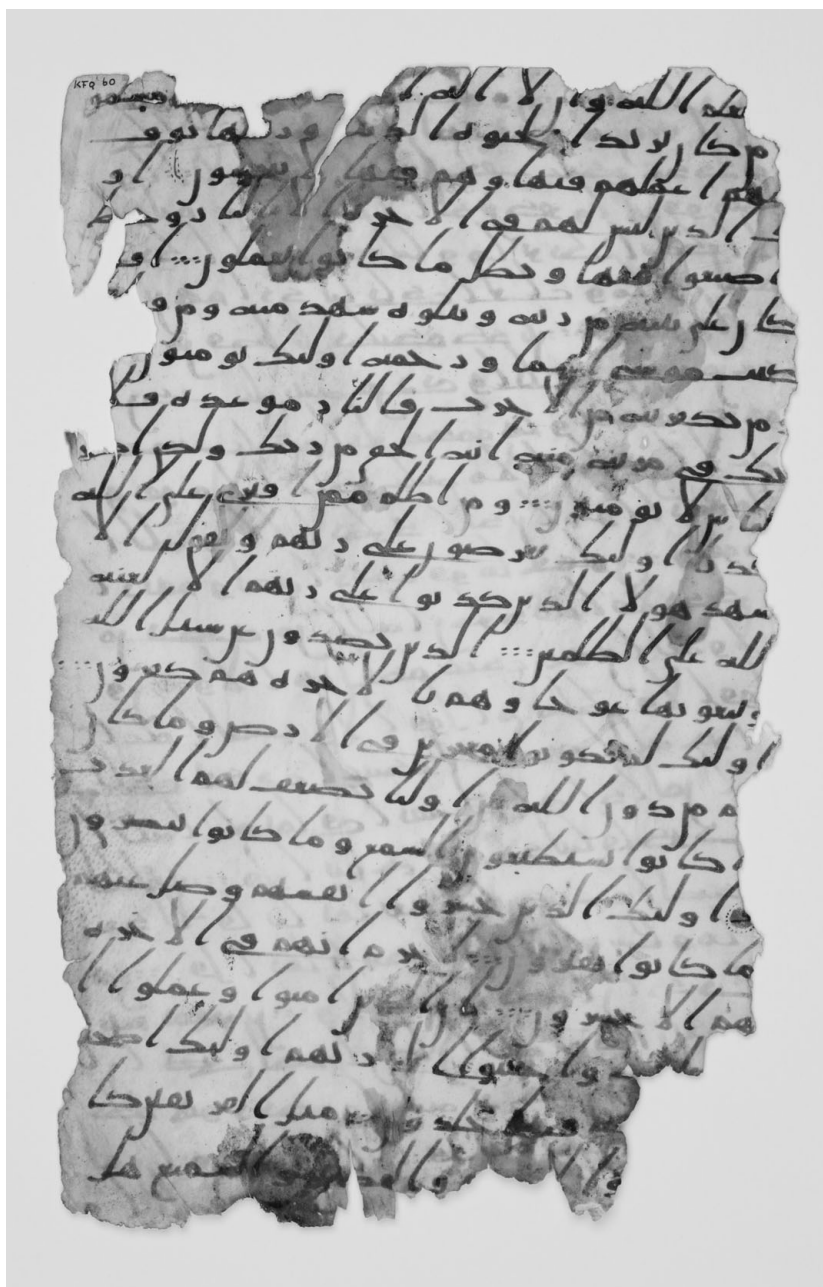


Fig. 4 Leaf from the Qur'ān in Hijāzī script, early eighth century

The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art

KFQ 60

Single folio from a Qur'ān, Sūra of Hūd (Q, 9.14 to 24), verses 14 (middle) to 24 (middle), probably the Hijāz, early 8th century.

Ink on vellum, Hijāzī script, 23 or 25 lines to the page (fragmentary)

32.5 cm (maximum height)

rather than the end of the matter. One would expect that, just as the graphic form of redaction needed to be standardised, the language of the text expressed in this graphic form itself required a certain formalisation; the notion of a 'vehicular Arabic' has already been mentioned. It has long been suggested that the language of the Qur'ān was built upon the paradigmatic language of Arabic poetry, a defining feature of which is the use of *i'rāb* or case endings reflecting an eastern or north-east Arabian provenance, in addition to Hijāzi features such as the dropping of the *hamza* and of the *i'rāb*.²⁹²

I'rāb is not reflected in the Qur'ānic *rasm*, nor does the medial *hamza*, in an ambient setting where the writing systems of other inflected languages, such as ASA, provide indications of case endings when required.²⁹³ What later Arabic linguistic tradition interpreted as the weakening, *takhfīf*, or rather the elision of the *hamza*, reflects in fact a retrospective accounting, in terms of what later became standard Arabic,²⁹⁴ for a well-known feature of Hijāzi Arabic of Paleo-Islamic times, namely, the absence of this glottal stop.²⁹⁵ According to a tradition emanating from Ibn 'Umar, Muḥammad did not pronounce the *hamza*, nor did Abū Bakr, 'Umar or other early Caliphs, and the introduction of the *hamza* was a later development.²⁹⁶ This is very well reflected in the *rasm* of the 'Uthmānic *muṣḥaf*, where the *hamza* appears only in the word-initial position, where it may even indicate, in the form of an *alif*, an initial vowel rather than an initial phonemic glottal stop,²⁹⁷ a phenomenon also evident in later *qirā'āt* of

²⁹² This matter is complicated by the fact that certain rhymes demand the realization of the *hamza*, and that this letter tended to be realized acoustically in what is now the Qur'anic Vulgate (Neuwirth, *Koran*, 261). The language of the Qur'ān involved of course more than this, as has been suggested. All these are controversial matters, starting with Vollers, *Volksprache*, 169 ff., 177 ff. and ch. 5 *passim*, involving a variety of revisions, including the thesis of a Hijāzi substrate with poetical modifications. The best account of this and of subsequent scholarship remains Zwettler, *Oral Tradition*, ch. 3. Blau ('Beginnings', §§ 5, 5.1) is highly critical of Vollers' hypercritical theses and proposes 'Neo-Arabic' as a trans-Arabian vehicular medium of communication.

²⁹³ An inscription at Jabal Sal', just outside Medina, brings in the names of Abū Bakr and Muḥammad in the nominative where standard Arabic would have had them in the accusative, i.e., bereft of *i'rāb*; for dating these inscriptions, the author uses the conjunction of Abū Bakr and 'Umar at the Battle of the Ditch in AH 5, which had been mentioned by al-Wāqidi (Hamidullah, 'Arabic inscriptions', 439 f. and D, E).

²⁹⁴ See, in a broader context, the comments of Neuwirth, 'Gotteswort', 26, and *passim*.

²⁹⁵ Not unlike the procedures of much modern scholarship based on morphological etymologies, classical Arabic grammar and morphology take the *hamza* for original, and its weakening or elision as derivative of the norm, thus transposing historical developments into morphological rules: al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.329 ff.

²⁹⁶ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.329.

²⁹⁷ Testen, 'Literary Arabic', 212 f., the author's assumption (211) being that any consistent feature in the consonantal stratum inconsistent with 'Arabiyya may be interpreted as authentically Hijāzi with a fair degree of certainty.

Ḥijāzī inspiration and origin.²⁹⁸ The same might be said of another well-known phenomenon, the occasional elision of the *alif* after the definite article in this canonical *rasm*.²⁹⁹ The absence of orthographic markers of case endings may then provide an indication that such were absent from the original language in which the *rasm* was redacted.³⁰⁰ There were other phonetic elisions (compared to canonical Arabic) that still need further investigation.³⁰¹

This point about Ḥijāzī dialectal features is established, but does not account for all the linguistic features of the *muṣḥaf*'s *rasm*. Its incidence will need to be studied by paleographers, and its weight relative to other dialectal interventions will be dependent on the discovery of earlier manuscripts and other graphic impressions of the text. Given certain incongruities and uncertainties, one might start thinking productively about the possibility of a specifically Muḥammadan idiolect and of very individual turns of phrase and other linguistic features that may be specifically his.

The dialectal vocabulary of the Qur'ān is diverse, probably representing its process of composition and earliest transmission and retention.³⁰² But since it is unreasonable to maintain that, apart from features just highlighted, this reflected immediately the dialect of Quraysh, or more broadly that of the Ḥijāz, and as one needs to factor in formalisation, one would need to see this language as West Arabian mediated and formalised by the formal pre-Islamic Arabic koine, become the vehicular Arabic. As noted above, this was not limited to poetry, but extended to administrative and military Arabic in which neither the written nor the dialectal had primacy, and in which neither the dialectal nor the written could be said to be entirely secondary to the other. Let it not be forgotten that Zayd b. Thābit for one, by all accounts very centrally involved in the 'Uthmānic redaction, was also adept at producing formal documents and correspondence.³⁰³ The

²⁹⁸ Ibn Kathīr after Ibn Fulayḥ, Nāfi' after Warsh, and others: al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.329.

²⁹⁹ Testen, 'Literary Arabic', 213 f., who speculates (at 152–3 n. 24) about the dialectal reason for its graphic retention even with solar letters. Yet another feature of the consonantal text that can be considered in regard to Ḥijāzī dialectal features in the consonantal text is the form of the feminine plural of the relative pronoun, canonically read as *al-lā'ī* (220 ff.).

³⁰⁰ Donner, *Narratives*, 36 f. A similar condition is analysed by Larcher, 'Standard', 2 f., 6 f., on epigraphic evidence of the inscription of Jabal Usays of AD 528–529 (Grohmann, *Paläographie*, 2.15 ff.), with the suggestion that the use of the pausal form is a trace of the spoken language, and on papyrological evidence dated AH 22, showing the lack of case inflection (short vowels), visible or invisible.

³⁰¹ Catalogued in al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 2.489 ff.

³⁰² For a catalogue, doubtless coloured by later formal lexicography of 'Arabiyya, see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.469 ff.

³⁰³ 'Zayd b. Thābit', *El*.

vehicular Arabic of the Qur'ān also had to respond to the desiderata of Hījāzī orthography, whatever its original provenance and early history.³⁰⁴ That this non-vernacular language retained certain archaic features,³⁰⁵ and that it contains dialectal elements from far afield, is testimony to the live communicative composition of the Qur'ān,³⁰⁶ and to the diversity of audiences and transmitters.

Recent studies of the earliest Qur'ānic manuscripts, 'defective' in the ways outlined above, nevertheless show a deliberative formalisation in great detail. This included a literary sequence in an approximate order of decreasing length that seems to have marked the very earliest recensions, and could on this score be considered to have been original, possibly going back to the time of Abū Bakr, or even earlier,³⁰⁷ as already suggested. Divisions internal to each chapter were also notated, and this is evident from the manuscripts studied by Déroche and from the Topkapi manuscript. The extant Qur'ānic codices at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France are physically arranged in a deliberate way after the manner of extant Greek manuscripts, divided into quinions (quires of ten folios), with the flesh side of the parchment outermost,³⁰⁸ from as early as the second half of the first Hijra century.³⁰⁹ The layout shows evidence of ruling and of attention to the physical proportions of the page.³¹⁰ Similarly, chapters were from a very early date, albeit not invariably, identified by names of convenience which, as we have seen, were not uniform in the various codices in circulation, and these two formal elements might well be seen in a common context of formalisation and canonisation.³¹¹ They were also indicated by red marks.³¹² Finally, ornamentation – as distinct from illumination – in the earliest extant Qur'ānic manuscripts had functional use as a device to help in navigating the text,³¹³ in the manner of a cursor.

³⁰⁴ Donner, *Narratives*, 37 and the scholarship there cited. Zwettler (*Oral Tradition*, 123 ff., 165) sees this as an 'Uthmānic compromise, using a script with origins in al-Hīra and, possibly, he guesses, Najrān.

³⁰⁵ Zwettler, *Oral Tradition*, 146 ff.

³⁰⁶ Attempts to interpolate emendations into the body of the Qur'ān, as with Bellamy, 'Emendations', and Stewart, 'Notes', assume ultimately a stable Ur-Qur'ān rather than an evolving canon with many components, although it must be said that a small number of such emendations may not be implausible on purely philological grounds, given copyists' errors in a mother-codex.

³⁰⁷ Blachère, *Introduction*, 29, 46 f.

³⁰⁸ *Muṣḥaf Topkapi*, 'Tamhīd', 86, and Déroche, *Codicology*, 73 f., who indicates (at 51) that the turn to the use of paper came in 808, by Caliphal directive.

³⁰⁹ Déroche, *Transmission*, 151. ³¹⁰ Déroche, *Codicology*, 159 f., 169 f.

³¹¹ Cf. Robinson, *Discovering*, 269 f. and ch. 12, *passim*. ³¹² Déroche, *Codicology*, 115.

³¹³ Déroche, *Codicology*, 229.

Empire and editorial rationalisation

The foregoing indicates a relative stability, and decided scrupulousness in transmission.³¹⁴ Clearly, from the time of 'Uthmān and most particularly under the Umayyads, there had been concerted efforts to formalise and professionalise writing, and a decided policy of religious centralisation, of which canonisation formed part. This is not least the case because of the requirements of empire, and the legacy of empires previously in place: there needed to be a 'canonical habit of mind before there was finally a canon'.³¹⁵ As suggested already, canonisation is one marker of the religious life of Late Antiquity from which our story emerges; the period saw canonisations of Greek writings secular and scriptural as well as of the *Mishna* under Hadrian and thereafter, the emergence of the Talmudic canons, and the canonisation of the Avesta under the Sasanids.³¹⁶

The 'Uthmānic *muṣḥaf*, now that Scripture was becoming a literary canon, spread its remit by copying and distribution. According to indications available, internal both to the extant manuscripts and to reports in literary sources, this was the work of teams of copyists, with indications of some form of professionalisation of this craft, in tandem with the development of the chancery and the use of official documents and seals,³¹⁷ starting with Medina. These teams must have been responsible for the formal

³¹⁴ Not unexpectedly, the Codex Parisino-Petropolitanus contains evident retouches and indications of correction and emendation, including emendations of verse divisions, improvements to the master copy, and corrections of what appears to have been faulty dictation or copying infelicities. There are also traces of erasure (Déroche, *Transmission*, 45 f., 47 ff., 78 ff., 149, 149 n. 141, 152 f.). In the St Petersburg E20, four readings belonging to Ibn Mas'ūd were removed (Rezvan, *Qur'ān*, 67). Powers (*Muḥammad*, ch. 8, *passim*) studied erasure (at Q, 4.12, 176) forensically in great detail, and showed that there had indeed been a slight change in the consonantal skeleton effecting performed reading. But these do not warrant the conclusion that the consonantal skeleton remained open until 705 (*ibid.*, 161), neither would they give rise to the admissibility of including new verses in a text, on the presumption that it was still under constitution as the late Umayyad and Abbasid manuscripts were produced (Déroche, *Transmission*, 176). Emendations and corrections would not be wholly unnatural or unexpected even in a text which was entirely stable and uniform orthographically, and need not on that score be seen to yield melodramatic conclusions (cf. Epp, 'Multivalence', 269; Small, *Textual Criticism*, 74, 136 f.). One needs to look at orthographic corrections (the change from *kl* to *kll* in Powers), copyists' errors, possible causes for correction arising from other texts and manuscripts, and the histories of a number of early manuscript traditions over a wide range of manuscripts, in order to form any workable opinion on this bundle of connected paleographic issues. There is evidence for minor orthographic displacements between some early manuscripts and the received canon, such as erasures and additions relating to the obscure word *ṭuwā* in some early manuscript fragments – an evident emendation, as the canonical form does not appear in some early commentaries (Fedeli, 'Relevance', 5 ff.). All this renewed attention to manuscripts has the potential for the emergence of a new sub-discipline in Qur'ānic studies.

³¹⁵ Kermode, 'Canon', 601. ³¹⁶ Sawyer, *Sacred Languages*, 63, 70 ff., 74 f.

³¹⁷ Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2.154 f., 234; Déroche, 'Beauté', 26 f.

features described.³¹⁸ Both literary sources and manuscript evidence concur that the Umayyads, particularly 'Abd al-Malik and his son al-Walīd, both great monumental builders who commissioned inscriptions, and their governors in Iraq, were very actively involved in the formalisation and standardisation of script as part of a more general administrative standardisation.³¹⁹ Orthographic and other technical revisions and corrections over a long period of time are clear from codicological and paleographic evidence.³²⁰

In fact, the Umayyads, and 'Abd al-Malik in particular, gave a decisive push towards the standardisation of Qur'ānic text after the Second Civil War (c. 680–692) with the attempt, ultimately successful, to adopt, after adaptation, the 'Uthmānic redaction of the holy book, and to consign to the margins others still in circulation at the time, but which maintained thereafter a largely literary, exegetical and antiquarian career.³²¹ Knowledge of non-'Uthmānic Qur'āns was prized,³²² as a sign of erudition. In this, elements of Umayyad chancery and monumental script were used.³²³ The non-'Uthmānic codices or autograph texts³²⁴ of Ibn Mas'ūd (Kūfa), Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī (Baṣra), Miqdād b. Aswad (Damascus) and Ubayy b. Ka'b (the rest of Syria) were not simply secure variants of the 'Uthmānic codex.³²⁵ Some, as mentioned earlier, did exclude portions of the text retained in the 'Uthmānic codex; others included elements not within it; some had different names for chapters. But each in its own region attained a kind of metropolitan status.³²⁶ The relationship between these, and especially between the *muṣḥaf* of Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī following that of 'Umar I and the codex eventually produced by a commission set up by al-Ḥajjāj,³²⁷ is

³¹⁸ Déroche, *Codicology*, 198; Whelan, 'Witness', 13 f.

³¹⁹ This is reflected in the evolution of numismatic epigraphy: Bates, 'Numismatics', 257. It is vexing to meet with the incongruous suggestion that 'Abd al-Malik, eager to receive epistles about the Prophet from 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr (as did Mu'āwiya from Ziyād b. Abī Sufyān and Abū Hurayra), an indefatigable correspondent with his governors, the creator of the epigraphic *dīnār*, and the patron of the upgrading of the Qur'ānic *rasm* by al-Ḥajjāj, was opposed to the writing of religious texts (Schoeler, *Charakter*, 46).

³²⁰ Rezvan, *Qur'ān*, 67; Small, *Textual Criticism*, 167 ff.

³²¹ Cf. de Prémare, *Coran*, 90, 93, but one would be well advised to set aside the proposal that there was a legal Qur'ān by Zayd and another amalgamated by the Umayyads. See also Mingana, 'Ancient', 201 ff., 201 nn. 2–4, and Mingana, 'Qur'ān', *ERE*, 10.547 ff., and especially Déroche, 'Beauté', 24 ff. On 'Abd al-Malik and the Qur'ān as a historiographical topic, see Neuwirth, *Komposition*, 18 ff.

³²² *GAS*, 1.3.

³²³ For somewhat contradictory statements, see Khoury, 'Papyruskunde', 263 and Déroche, *Transmission*, 109 ff. For relevant codicological aspects of epigraphy, see Grohmann, *Papyri*, xxi ff. and Maraqtan, 'Writing materials', 300 ff.

³²⁴ See 'Codices of the Qur'ān', *EQ*, for a synoptic review.

³²⁵ Beck, 'Koranvarianten', 353. ³²⁶ Jeffery, *Qur'ān Scripture*, 94 ff.

³²⁷ On this commission, whose members were by no means homogeneous, Hamdan, *Koranisierung*, 141 ff.

difficult to determine or to disentangle, as this was carried, in some form or another, by the reading of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, which did not eventually become canonical.³²⁸

The codex of al-Ḥajjāj amalgamated the codex of ‘Uthmān in its Baṣran transmission,³²⁹ the Medinan text of Abū al-‘Āliya after Zayd b. Thābit, Ubayy b. Ka‘b and ‘Umar I, and a Medinan text brought by some of the Anṣār, including Anas b. Mālik.³³⁰ The codex of al-Ḥajjāj attempted, with greater rigour than his predecessors, to reform and tighten orthographic conventions and insert some consonantal elements.³³¹ Apart from eleven changes in reading/writing, it involved the canonical division of the text, a greater consistency in diacritical pointing, divisions in tenths, sevenths and fifths relevant to recitation (and often accompanied by rhythmical notation at specified occasions),³³² and a count of the numbers of words and consonants contained within it.³³³ In short, there was a move here towards a *scriptio plena* as standard³³⁴ – so much so, indeed, that in later centuries one would find that even roughly engraved amulets contained the *hamza* and the *shadda* (gemination mark) on Qur’ānic verses cited to fortify the magical effect of the object.³³⁵

The canonical text was thereby closed, and quantitatively accounted for, although this did not preclude variant readings.³³⁶ Copies were dispatched to the provinces, and other codices destroyed, including that of Ibn Mas‘ūd, whose reading was proscribed although it was to remain in circulation for centuries yet; those who still used it were persecuted intermittently. Exceptionally, the governor of Egypt, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān, brother

³²⁸ Hamdan, *Koranisierung*, 35, 38 f., 133.

³²⁹ It should be noted that not all ‘Uthmānic codices in Syria, Medina, Baṣra and al-Kūfa were copied from the archetype; variations between them are nevertheless fairly negligible, and there is little contamination between them, testimony to fairly stable transmission (Cook, ‘Stemma’, 90 ff., 103 f., and *passim*). A concrete impression of the situation might be illustrated by the manuscript of the Qur’ān kept at the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art in Istanbul, which unlike the Topkapı manuscript does contain the names of the chapters and indications as to whether they were Meccan or Medinan, but is nevertheless orthographically irregular, see *Mushaf al-Muthaf al-‘Athār*, ‘Madkhal’, 116 ff., and 124 ff. on other manuscripts of similarly early vintage.

³³⁰ Hamdan, *Koranisierung*, 37.

³³¹ Hamdan, *Koranisierung*, 135 f., although ‘Ubayd Allāh did include the *mu‘awwadhatān* in prayer, which were quite deliberately absent from the codex of Ibn Mas‘ūd (137).

³³² This in itself became a minor Qur’ānic discipline from the beginning of the eighth century: *GAS*, 1.4. See Spitaler, *Verzählung*.

³³³ Hamdan, *Koranisierung*, 149 ff., 152 ff., 156 ff., and see the standard Muslim version in al-Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 49 f.

³³⁴ Blachère, *Introduction*, 75 ff. ³³⁵ Sijpesteijn, ‘Talisman’, 201.

³³⁶ The very individual reading of ‘Āsim b. Bahdala al-Asadī, who died in 745 (Beck, ‘Koranvarianten’, 376), one of the seven canonical readings, was the one adopted, through the transmission of his pupil Ḥafṣ b. Sulaymān al-Bazzāz (d. 796), by the Cairo Vulgate of 1923, again under royal impulse. See Blachère, *Introduction*, 134 f.

of ‘Abd al-Malik, declined to accept this new Vulgate.³³⁷ The issue was especially closed to privateering outside the boundaries of state authority – earlier, in 670/1, Samara b. Jundub, a governor of Baṣra on behalf of Ziyād b. Abī Sufyān, had had a number of men executed for attempting another Qur’ānic collation.³³⁸

Earlier still, the then Umayyad governor of Medina, Marwān b. al-Ḥakam had the *muṣḥaf* of Ḥafsa, Muḥammad’s widow and the daughter of Abū Bakr, destroyed immediately following her funeral to preclude any variation from the ‘Uthmānic codex.³³⁹ The rapidly centralising state needed a ‘master-copy’,³⁴⁰ the need for which was not purely technical, or only concerned with correcting (or updating) faulty copying that had intervened in the forty years since the promulgation of ‘Uthmān’s codex.³⁴¹ Given the political circumstances at the time of al-Ḥajjāj, the state needed additionally to keep an Umayyad guarantee for the integrity of the Vulgate, and for this integrity to be in the custody of an emergent class of specialists, in line with ‘Abd al-Malik’s active religious policy. These were generically known as *qurrā*, whose origins might well be seen as orators on the field of battle, commissars *avant la lettre*, early on attached to mosques, operating also as judges and sermonisers.³⁴² Their distinction from what eventually became state-salaried *quṣṣāṣ* and *qurrā*’ is not particularly clear in this period.³⁴³ These specialists included al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, perhaps the most important member of al-Ḥajjāj’s Qur’ān commission.³⁴⁴ The role of this class of politico-religious actors transmitting Qur’ānic materials might be compared with the parallel role of *ruwāt* (sg. *rāwī*) transmitting historical and pseudohistorical materials in this period.³⁴⁵

Crucially, the *qurrā*’ of al-Kūfa, and perhaps to a lesser extent of Baṣra, drawn from the lower rungs of the Arab patriciate as well as from clients (*mawālī*), and particularly from anti-Umayyad Anṣār elements once favoured by ‘Umar I,³⁴⁶ conjugated their opposition to al-Ḥajjāj’s Vulgate

³³⁷ Hamdan, *Koranisierung*, 138 ff., 170 f.; see the standard Muslim version in al-Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 119 ff.

³³⁸ TAB, 969. ³³⁹ Al-Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 21. ³⁴⁰ Schoeler, *Oral and Written*, 73.

³⁴¹ This technical aspect seems to be the major point of emphasis of Blachère, *Introduction*, 78, 78 n. 102.

³⁴² See the ample material in Pedersen, ‘Preacher’, 232 ff., and *passim*. Lexical and historical associations between *qurrā*’ and periodic military activity (Calder, ‘*Qurrā*’, 305 f. and *passim*) would tend to reinforce what is being suggested here.

³⁴³ On the latter, see Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*, §§ 11 ff., 19 ff., 27, 32, 34, 37. See ‘Athamina, ‘Qaṣaṣ’, 59 ff. and Afsaruddin, ‘Excellences’, 17. There is no reason summarily to designate the *qurrā*’ as ‘religious enthusiasts’, without qualification (Hawting, *Dynasty*, 28). On the *qurrā*’ as carriers of state religious policy, Sayed, *Revolte*, 283 ff., 287, 288 ff.

³⁴⁴ TG, 1.40 ff., 71, and ch. B2.2.2, 2.4.1.2, 3.1.1. ³⁴⁵ Beck, ‘Arabiyya’, 209.

³⁴⁶ Sayed, *Revolte*, 280 ff., 290 f.; Hinds, ‘Kūfan’, 347.

and the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf*, and their partiality to other readings, with their partiality for the anti-Ḥajjāj revolt led by Ibn al-Ash‘ath, an event of considerable importance at the time and the last major revolt against ‘Abd al-Malik.³⁴⁷ The mighty and energetic al-Ḥajjāj deployed ferociously, as was his wont, the full force of the Umayyad state, and the revolt was crushed in 701.

Later, as suggested, other *maṣāḥif* remained, as a literary and exegetical phenomenon, with variant Readings of the ‘Uthmānic Vulgate eventually being brought into the system of seven readings by Ibn Mujāhid (d. 963) under the patronage of the Abbasid *wazīr* Ibn Muqla (d. 940).³⁴⁸ Unsurprisingly, this further rationalisation of canon was accomplished in tandem with yet another reform of Arabic script, again following administrative practice,³⁴⁹ which succeeded another when the Abbasids came to power and Ḥijāzi was displaced by Kufic.³⁵⁰ A century after Ibn Mujāhid, two distinct lines of transmission for each of the seven Readings were already on record.³⁵¹ Departures from the Vulgate, and public readings of non-‘Uthmānic or pre-‘Uthmānic Qur’āns, resulted in the requirement of formal, written and witnessed recitation, if consequences of a grave nature were to be avoided.³⁵²

The Paleo-Muslim canon thus moved with its various metaphorical palimpsests through its initial phases – a corpus of palimpsests of revelation, enunciative declamation, fragmentary writing of various lengths, deliberate redaction on various scales and by various means, media and dialectal inflections, and oral testimony to such – on to its more deliberate redaction in a specific *rasm* that was yet to evolve further. With the Umayyad Vulgate it was, for all intents and purposes, complete and sealed, surrounded by a corpus of readings and dialectal investigation. With Ibn Mujāhid, it became definitively what may properly be called the Muslim canon.

A final note on Qur’ānic Biblicism

The issue of Biblicism is but one aspect of composition like others that have been addressed, and has come up at various points above. The

³⁴⁷ Sayed, *Revolte*, 292 f.; Blachère, *Introduction*, 73 ff. Many of these had but scant Qur’ānic expertise (Sinai, *Fortschreibung*, 55 f.), although what may have counted for expertise on the part of the generality of these people is a moot point.

³⁴⁸ See ‘Readings of the Qur’ān’, *EQ*, 4.355 ff.; Naser, *Transmission*, ch. 2 *passim*.

³⁴⁹ Tabbāa, ‘Canonicity’. ³⁵⁰ Rezvan, *Qur’ān*, 70. ³⁵¹ Jeffery, *Scripture*, 100.

³⁵² Famously in the case of Ibn Shunbūdh (or Shannabūdh). One of the witnesses to his recitation was none other than the *wazīr* Ibn Muqla himself, on which incident see Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 6.300 ff. For these later developments, see Jeffery, *Scripture*, 99 f. and Watt, *Bell’s Introduction*, 49 f.

canonical Qur'ān, we have seen, was assembled from a variety of prototypes and fragments whose authenticity was duly witnessed, or which were regarded as authentic. The above discussion has taken up the themes of composition and canonisation, considered primarily in their technical and material respects, irrespective of content. It is yet appropriate to make a few comments on the form and content of Biblical affinity.

The model of Qur'ānic composition discussed suggests intense communicative circumstances and procedures involving a rapidly evolving series of enunciations. Briefly to recapitulate, this is reflected in the organisation of materials within the holy book, often attracting derisive comment. The Qur'ān contains parables, cataclysmic and in ways arguably eschatological annunciations, oaths and mantic utterances, dicta, injunctions and prohibitions, warnings, threats, biblical themes and other pseudohistorical narratives, repetitions, digressions and redundancies. Its sequential organisation conveys the impression of careless redaction, as if pieces of the text 'just fell in'.³⁵³ This matter has been well expressed synoptically:

A *sura* of any length will usually take up and dismiss a variety of topics in no obvious order, and a given topic may be treated in several *suras*. The largest effective units of structure thus tend to be blocks of verses which the formal organisation of the text does nothing to demarcate. Within such blocks, trivial dislocations are surprisingly frequent. God may appear in the first and third persons in one and the same sentence; there may be omissions which, if not made good by interpretation, render the sense unintelligible.³⁵⁴

The author adds that these are puzzling features whose preservation in the text points to extraordinarily conservative editing, with elements kept just as they fell in; long before, Renan quite rightly had taken this as a mark of textual integrity.³⁵⁵ This tallies well with the model proposed, a model which would account for 'clear cases of interpolation', such as *sūra* 53 where prosaic and prolix amplification interrupts, in two places, a text that otherwise consists of short verses in an inspired style.³⁵⁶ More could be mentioned, and Bell's *Commentary* indicates these clearly throughout. As with Biblical inconsistencies, taking stock of this theme is in itself a

³⁵³ Peters, 'Historical Muḥammad', 299.

³⁵⁴ Cook, *Muhammad*, 68, and cf. al-Khūlī, *Manāhij*, 305 ff., suggesting the consequences of such a view for Qur'ānic studies, including the emphasis on topical pericopes and working through them. Classical Muslim exegesis was very well aware of this question of scattered elements constituting pericopes, the technical term for which was *al-munāsaba*, but this was only infrequently accorded deliberate attention, with the notable exceptions of al-Rāzī and a few others. For an overview, al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1.300 ff.

³⁵⁵ Renan, *Histoire générale*, 367.

³⁵⁶ Cook, *Muhammad*, 69.

historical tool permitting the reconstruction of a history of the text at variance with its naïve reading.³⁵⁷

In the model of Qur'ānic composition here proposed, the term 'interpolation' is perhaps misconceived, assuming a model of Qur'ānic composition conceived as work upon a considered original, rather than a text in process whose edition, if such were an appropriate term to use, was not quite accomplished. 'Interpolation' does not convey the process of continuous proclamation and redaction, with continual feedback and self-reference, whose sole criterion of being party to the Qur'ān is authorised delivery. Interpolations technically considered there certainly were. But these must be treated as compositional elements internal to the very process of redaction, verses inserted here and there on the scarce material media on which the text was redacted, as they fell in into the process of writing and collation. Yet one need not lose sight of other aspects of the *muṣṣhaf*. Certain portions of it betray deliberate and sustained narrative structure and flow, with little or no interpolation, and the chapter of Joseph (Q, 12, in all probability of late Meccan inspiration, but later literary form) is an excellent case in point.³⁵⁸ It bespeaks deliberate and protracted redaction, with scenes, narrative development, exposition and retrospective references.³⁵⁹

The question of the Biblical influence on the Qur'ān is best approached in the context of the above. Such a perspective would help evade the major pitfall of the simplistic and conjectural model of borrowing without further qualification, with indications of chapter and verse in the manner indicated at various points in the foregoing discussions of this book. This model regards the earlier as normative and the latter as derivative, making it difficult to appreciate either in its specific setting.³⁶⁰ What is proposed here is a perspective that will also avoid the pitfall of conceiving an 'epigonic Qur'ān' inattentive to its process of composition.³⁶¹ Ultimately and

³⁵⁷ Barton, 'Unity and diversity', 13.

³⁵⁸ The Qur'ānic narrative of Joseph has been the focus of much scholarly attention, some of which has been referred to already, and there is a fairly long bibliography, not least, for earlier scholarship, in the lengthy treatment by Speyer, *Erzählungen*, 187 ff. See 'Yūsuf', *El*.

³⁵⁹ Neuwirth, 'Struktur', 138 ff. ³⁶⁰ Cf. Waldman, 'Approaches', 1 ff.

³⁶¹ Neuwirth, 'In the full light', 17, but one would be reluctant to embrace a view that there was a grand symphonic design at the base of the Qur'ān. Weil (*Legenden*, 3 f.) maintained that Islam was Judaism without many rituals and ceremonial laws, and Christianity without the Trinity and the Crucifixion; more circumspectly, von Harnack (*Lehrbuch*, 2.537) maintained that 'Der Islam ist eine Umbildung der von dem gnostischen Judentum selbst schon umgebildeten jüdischen Religion auf dem Boden des Araberthums durch einen grossen Propheten.' For his part, Nöldeke (Review of Wellhausen, *Reste*, 720), seconded Wellhausen's view of greater Christian relevance to the Qur'ān, yet could not resist the refrain that Islam was 'die einfachere, consequentere Vollendung des A. T., die eigentliche semitische Religion ist'. Speyer (*Erzählungen*) provides a tally of parallelisms with Biblical accounts of prophets from the Torah with haggadic support,

implicitly, this model of borrowing serves the purposes of asserting causality, and somehow supposes that availability of biblical material, ascertainable or not, is a sufficient explanation for its adoption and incorporation in the Qur'ān, becoming elements of secondary Biblicisation.

Such an all-too-common procedure dissolves the Qur'ān into a mosaic of bookish borrowings without a concrete *Sitz im Leben*, a mosaic in which the compositional process practically vanishes.³⁶² Biblicisms, and they are many, need to be seen in terms of compositional, situational and communicative purposes and procedures of redaction, rather than being constitutive of the Qur'ān's textual architectonic. In short, a proper historical reconstruction needs to steer away from the false question of originality, whatever this may mean and in whichever sense it might be meant, and to refocus the question of intertextuality, the more benign cousin of borrowing, onto the Qur'ānic *Sitz im Leben*. This would downgrade the relevance of tallying quotations and references, checking them against supposedly original sources, and resting content with concluding that they were garbled or debased.³⁶³

Two points might be made here, and taken as heuristic guidelines: that there is little evidence in the Qur'ān of direct Biblical quotation,³⁶⁴ and that, if one looked at the analogous situation of the relation between the Old Testament and the Ras Shamra tablets, the two would appear to be too close for independent formulation, and the differences too significant for direct literary dependence.³⁶⁵ Ultimately, one would need to speak of affinities and assonances rather than influences; affinity is established by similarity broadly conceived to encompass analogy, transference and metonymy and other rhetorical figures, while influence would require a demonstration of causality. In this context, the Qur'ān might not be considered as an epigonic collage.

and Ahrens ('Christliches') gives a detailed listing of textual parallels between the Qur'ān and the New Testament, concluding (172) that very little was borrowed from Mark, Luke and John, most borrowings being from Matthew, possibly through the medium of some harmonised redaction of Matthew including elements from other gospels, with a Nestorian and Docetic twist (153 f.) – a heady cocktail of influences, indeed. For this whole body of material, modern scholarship in Arabic has produced tallies with what one author calls the *Masīḥīyyāt*, on analogy with the *Isrā'īlīyyāt* (al-Sharfī, *al-Fikr*, 407), including references to the Pseudoepigrapha and the Syriac religious lexicon: al-Sharfī, *al-Fikr*, 405 ff., and Ju'ayt, *Sīra*, 2.170 ff. See the comments of Neuwirth, *Komposition*, 5 (on Speyer) and 5 ff. (on Qur'ānic studies in relation to earlier scriptures).

³⁶² Cf. Fueck, 'Originality', 89, who wrote of Muḥammad vanishing in this perspective.

³⁶³ On this shift in studies of the Qur'ān, see the comments of Wheeler, *Moses*, 4 ff., 21 ff., 22 n. 11.

³⁶⁴ This was already noted by Renan, *Histoire générale*, 365.

³⁶⁵ *CHB*, 71. Bell (*Origin*, 69, 100) speaks of Muḥammad's originality being that 'of a strong mind, working upon very imperfect information', and adds that if Christian influence there was, this would have been introduced during the Apostle's career, rather than before it began, and that it cannot be seen as a template or model.

It would be useful to recall what Muḥammad and his companions may have known of the Bible and of the Pseudoepigrapha. Clearly, not much textual material was familiar to them; as noted long ago, Muḥammad announced Talmudic and Midrashic elements as novelties.³⁶⁶ Recent research indicates that fragments of a Syriac gospel may have circulated in the Ḥijāz, in addition to various Pseudoepigraphic gospels in Syriac, albeit with obscure histories and forms of circulation. Otherwise, and prior to the ninth century, any Arabic versions of or fragments from the Gospels, integral or synoptic, from Arabia (from Jafnid Sergiopolis/al-Ruṣāfa or the Naṣrid al-Ḥira) that may have existed left only the faintest of traces.³⁶⁷

Whatever the circumstances, what is clear is that the Qur'ānic references to the Injil and the Tawrāt are unclear as to what they indicated: the whole Bible, the Pentateuch, the four Gospels, fragments thereof³⁶⁸ or the *Diatessaron*. Yet there were textual fragments that appear to be like quotations, by what pathways is entirely unclear. In addition to those indicated by authors cited above, we have quotations from the Book of Revelations in Q. 57.3³⁶⁹ and from Psalm 37.29 (Q. 21.105).³⁷⁰ There are references to *al-ḥikma*, which in many contexts might be interpreted as a Book of Wisdom (Q. 2.129, 151; 3.48, 164; 4.54, 113; 5.110; 33.34; 62.2), a possible reference to what in the Protestant Bible came to be known as the Wisdom of Solomon.³⁷¹ Qur'ānic ideas of God displaying himself in Signs, *āyāt*, and of the creation of existents from formless matter are, among other concordances, to be found in the Book of Solomon (13.1–5, 11.18).

Yet given the discussion above, it seems unlikely that one might construe these concordances and quotations after the image of bibliophile application and in terms of citation by scribes scouring scriptures for inspiration or support. Biblical echoes formed a part of the material spoken as revelation. In the Qur'ān's intertextual vortex, they were not, strictly speaking, procedurally intertextual,³⁷² but the Book did have a number of intertextual

³⁶⁶ Weil, *Legenden*, 5. ³⁶⁷ Griffith, 'Gospel', 131, 146 f., 153 ff., and cf. Abbott, *Papyri*, 47 ff.

³⁶⁸ Al-Sharfi, *al-Fikr*, 411.

³⁶⁹ Revelation 1.5.8, 21.5.6, 22.5.13, as indicated by Busse, 'Jerusalem', 12 n. 64.

³⁷⁰ Jeffery, *Qur'ān as Scripture*, 66.

³⁷¹ Therefore not 'occult wisdom', as in 'Ḥikma', *EI*. Possibly written in Greek originally, it is extant in the codices of Mount Sinai, Alexandria and the Vatican, and existed in a Syriac translation of unascertainable date and spread. The Wisdom of Solomon can be found in the Septuagint, but not in the Hebrew Bible, and has been transmitted primarily by Christians; the Council of Trent later regarded it as canonical, and Protestant Bibles counted it among the Apocrypha. Overall, the Qur'ānic uses of the word *ḥikma* have not been given due attention as to their contextual multivalence – see the comments of Gaudefroy-Demombynes, 'Quelques noms', 14 ff.

³⁷² Intertextuality is not a simple concept that can be used vaguely to indicate any connection between texts (see especially Todorov, *Bakhtin*, 68 ff. and ch. 5, *passim*), or as a foil to evading the use of 'borrowing'.

features such as allusion and quotation, and a number of hypertextual relations as well, characterised by reworking, sometimes on a comprehensive scale, and within the ambit of other contexts examined.³⁷³

An intertext implies the availability of another text. Yet Qur'ānic Biblicisms were declaimed and written down in much the same way as other material declaimed by Muḥammad that found its way into the Book. And there is of course much Biblical material that was not used at all. On balance, if one is dealing with borrowing, one needs correlatively to deal with omission, and to factor in the assumption that borrowing served the purposes of the borrower. For instance, there are some concordances of ideas of a general sort in the Qur'ān with the Book of Isaiah, but no quotations from it, important as it was throughout the history of Christianity and Judaism, not least for its severe criticism of the Jews and its strictures on the serial recidivism of the Israelites, matters which will have been welcomed by the Medinan Qur'ān.³⁷⁴ Similarly, and with regard to Judaeo-Christian material, there is no mention in the Qur'ān of Elkasai or of any other similar person in its accounts of prophecy.³⁷⁵

Moreover, the Qur'ān contains not only material that disputed Biblical statements and narratives or were at variance with them – the crucifixion of Christ is denied, his birth took place under a palm tree rather than in a grotto, he breathed life into clay. These are cases in point that have already been discussed, the Qur'ānic pronouncements already existing in the Nativity Gospel and the Pseudo-Evangelium of James, texts that lacked elements found in the Qur'ān – elements of a cyclical history of revelation, and narratives of Arab prophets, for instance,³⁷⁶ which are concordant with a notion of successive and equally valid prophecies to be found in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies³⁷⁷ – without this concordance needing to be taken for literary dependence. Biblical and apocryphal material, and other material as well,³⁷⁸ whatever the ultimate provenance, and by whatever means and in whatever media they may have been available in Muḥammad's milieu, obeyed the requirements of the Qur'ān itself, and its

³⁷³ For these notions, Genette, *Palimpsests*, 1 ff., 5 ff., and *passim*. The reader might be reminded, by way of example, of the collation of the Qur'ānic material on Pharaoh and Arab material on Thamūd: see, further, Bell, *Origin*, 107.

³⁷⁴ The book of Isaiah was later to be used for exactly this purpose in later Muslim traditions: Wheeler, 'Torah', 581 f., and sources there cited.

³⁷⁵ Cf. Griffith, 'Syriacisms', 85 ff. ³⁷⁶ Cf. Fueck, 'Originality', 92.

³⁷⁷ De Blois, 'Elchasai', 44 f.

³⁷⁸ One might mention the Alexander legend, whose Qur'ānic and Syriac redactions show extraordinary narrative concordances, but also significant differences (the speaker of the text, eschatological materials and other matters). The Qur'ānic text is, nevertheless, distinctively an Arabic text, not a derived Syriac one. See van Bladel, 'Alexander', 177 ff., 194.

occasions of declamation and composition. One would inevitably come to the suggestion that, instead of seeking sources against which Qur'ānic positions might be weighed, or which might figure as explanatory and even causal templates, one might instead scan the Qur'ānic occurrence of possible previous material, be it quotations, topoi or narratives, as a guide to reconstructing what texts may have been in circulation at the time of Qur'ānic composition.³⁷⁹

The conclusion to be drawn must be that borrowings and quotations are in fact adaptations to a new context of sentiments, topoi, stories and ideas in circulation, and that it is not the availability of Biblical and similar material that accounts for their Qur'ānic presence, but the requirements of the new scripture in process of composition which led to appropriation.

This can be well illustrated by the mode of presence of such material within the body of the text. In textual and structural terms, Qur'ānic Biblicism, as suggested in [chapter 5](#), works by the dispersal of Biblical materials and motifs. Earlier, in the Meccan period, it was Moses rather than Abraham who was to foreshadow Muḥammad and act as his double, to which were later added the figures of Abraham himself and of Noah, as the Qur'ān reread itself meaningfully in Medina.³⁸⁰ There is discernible a movement in the construal of these figures from foreshadows and exemplary analogues intended to instruct and warn (*'ibar*: Q, 3.13, 12.III, 26.97), although this foreshadowing need not imply properly typological prefiguration as in the interpretation of the Old Testament by the New. This movement then goes on to prototypes in narrative templates of Muḥammad's divine commission, and finally on to the full-fledged typologies they were later to acquire with the development of Muslim *Heilsgeschichte*, where they appear in the usual way as *figurae*.³⁸¹

But Qur'ānic Biblicism, it must be stressed, did not amount to a Biblicalisation of the Qur'ān, but is a Qur'ānisation of Biblical figures, *loci*, fragments, narratives and templates. Fragments from the Old and New Testaments appeared mainly in the Medinan period, following anecdotal

³⁷⁹ The Arabic *logia* and *agrapha* of Jesus collected and studied by Asin, 'Logia', mainly from later Muslim sources, often with scriptural or pseudo-epigraphic sources indicated (for instance, nos. 4, 16, 18) and occasionally with very early Arabic sources indicated (for instance, nos. 102.1–3), could well be subjected to a similar approach in different settings. The earlier collection of similar material by Margoliouth, 'Sayings', is much too truncated to be of much utility.

³⁸⁰ Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 398 ff.; *Coran*, 162 ff., 185 ff., 309 ff., and ch. XIII, *passim*; Prenner, *Muḥammad und Mūsā*, *passim*.

³⁸¹ The ascription of typology to the Qur'ān, conceptually fully developed (as in an otherwise most instructive article by Zwettler, 'Mantic manifesto', 96 ff.), would therefore appear anachronistic, and the interpretation of the term *zawj* in the Qur'ān as 'type-pair' (96 f.) would surely need to be considered an unnecessary contrivance.

prophetical material used in the earlier period.³⁸² That Muḥammad was integrated with the announcement of Emmanuel (Isaiah, 7.14; Matthew, 1.22–3), that he later acquired titles associated with the Paraclete (John 15.25–6),³⁸³ are not matters that bear hasty over-interpretation, as is not uncommonly the case.³⁸⁴ This is not least so because, in the case of Emmanuel, one must be wary of ascribing apocalyptic motifs to a text whose scheme of *Heilsgeschichte* was most rudimentary, unlike later glosses and later historiographic traditions. This is also the case because Qur'ānic Biblicism could be seen in terms of a bricolage, used for the purposes of the Qur'an itself.³⁸⁵ The question of Muḥammad's prefiguration in the Bible needs to be seen in the context³⁸⁶ not of intertextuality but of concrete relations with Hijāzi Jews, some of whom would not accept that the last prophet was an Arab rather than a descendant of Aaron, and that election to prophecy overall had now been confided to a new lineage.³⁸⁷ It is little wonder that the Qur'an charges Christians and Jews with having tampered with their original revealed scriptures (*tahrif* – Q, 2.59, 75; 3.3; 5.69; 9.111), building on a long late antique tradition of such charges, by Christians against Jews, by Marcion against the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John, by the pagan Celsus against the Gospels in general.³⁸⁸

This is fully borne out by detailed recent research. The Qur'ānic account of Joseph relates a didactic story of Joseph showing how God sends Signs, and does not proffer an account of Joseph's people, as in the Old Testament (where it occupies 28 per cent of Genesis). The two accounts do not tell the same story in thematic, theological or moral terms, despite numerous affinities.³⁸⁹ Indeed, the Qur'ānic narrative is artfully crafted in terms of sub-plots, psychological ambivalence, a transition from warning to brooding, in an almost novelistic spirit.³⁹⁰ Similarly, a study of the reworking off Psalms 104 and 136 shows much more than paraphrase.³⁹¹ Much the same

³⁸² Speyer (*Erzählungen*, 462, 467) maintains that the earlier period was marked by the adoption of mainly Christian and Judaeo-Christian material, the later period of material from the Old Testament.

³⁸³ The Syriac *mnaḥmānā* and other associated terms: *SH*, 1.307. I owe this clarification of Syriac transliterations (*al-mnaḥmānā*) in the Arabic text to Ramzi Baalbaki (personal communication). Al-Sharfi (*al-Fikr*, 480 ff.) brings out a long list of Old Testament and New Testament quotations on this theme as presented in Muḥammad's biography.

³⁸⁴ Wheeler, 'Torah', 580 ff.; Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 540–1 n. 310 and *Coran*, 397 f.

³⁸⁵ Muslim traditions weave the notion of the Paraclete into a thick texture, in which Zion becomes a typological name of Mecca: *SH*, 1.314.

³⁸⁶ On this theme, McAuliffe, 'Prediction'.

³⁸⁷ See, for instance, *US*, § 20; *SIH*, 2.118 ff., 138; *WAQ*, 365, 368. ³⁸⁸ Al-Sharfi, *al-Fikr*, 414.

³⁸⁹ Waldman, 'Approaches', 5 ff., 9 f.

³⁹⁰ Q, 41.53 f., and compare the psychological sparseness of the account in Genesis 39.1–30.

³⁹¹ Neuwirth, 'Psalmen', *passim*.

could be said about the evocation of the legend of the Companions of the Cave which, in the Qur'ān, unwraps the Christian framework in which it was packaged by Christian lore, and is made to fit into the Qur'ānic horizon, thereby taking on a whole new hermeneutical significance.³⁹²

Biblical narratives in the Qur'ān have little formal self-sufficiency, therefore, deploying motifs rather than themes, and used as secondary narrative mythopoeia, in narratives continually intruded upon by a stylistically disruptive rhetoric subordinating Biblical themes to Qur'ānic ones.³⁹³ The prophecy of Muḥammad was indeed recast after Biblical patterns after it had been cast in the simpler vatic terms of a seer of calamities. This recasting included patterns of prophetic sequence, the receipt of archetypal revelation pre-existing in Heaven, and the receipt of a Covenant, ideas appearing together among the Mandaeans and allegedly originating in Ebionism,³⁹⁴ or alternatively and perhaps more plausibly in terms of doctrine, if such borrowing were indeed to be demonstrated, from the mysterious allure of Pseudo-Clementine doctrines, carried by the Nazarene sect.³⁹⁵ But they are of course available elsewhere, and we have already seen that Arab Christianity and Judaism ran along meagre capillaries of doctrine. And it is arguable that ideas such as the Seal, or Sign of prophecy, later identified as a physical mark on Muḥammad's body, between his shoulder blades, is a Manichaean term and idea, as is the notion of the foundation of a religion as a recapitulation of ancient, perennial revelations.³⁹⁶ But we have also seen that this idea is not confined to Manichaeism.

But much of this exegetical material appears anyway to have been later glosses projected onto Qur'ānic material as it was later systematised and rendered coherent. An appreciation of Qur'ānic Biblicism would require a disengagement at once from later exegetical traditions and from considering the process of adaptation as one of literary dependence and borrowing, however much the idea of intertextuality might be alluring.

In conclusion, what may be said is that we have in the Paleo-Muslim, pre-exegetical Qur'ān a scripture, very much in the late antique way of scriptures, canonised in a manner entirely comprehensible and commensurable. It had rapidly come to be conceived as such. Its compositional history and characteristics bear comparison with other texts of a scriptural

³⁹² Griffith, 'Lore', 128 f., and *passim*.

³⁹³ Stetkevych, *Golden Bough*, 11 f.; Chabbi, *Seigneur*, 214, 225 and *Coran*, 83.

³⁹⁴ Schoeps, *Theologie*, 335, 337.

³⁹⁵ Sayous, *Jésus-Christ*, 23 – doctrines which speak of a Book descending from heaven, and of the spirit of God incorporated into a succession of prophets. See also von Harnack, *Lehrbuch*, 2.534 f. for Elkasaism.

³⁹⁶ Tardieu, 'Théorie', 108, 112 f.; 'Chaîne', 364 f.

nature emerging during this era, to which it makes reference, however vague at the time of inception, but nevertheless stamping itself with their marks of reference and continuity, not least as it projected forward the transmissible charisma of a foundational culture hero, in this case its guarantor Muḥammad, God's Apostle. Its contents bear out, as we saw in [chapter 6](#) above, all the characteristic hallmarks and byways of transition to monotheism accomplished elsewhere in this period. Finally, circulating under the auspices of a late antique empire with œcumenical ambition, arising from the history and ethnological setting of late antique Arabs now fully incorporated, centrally, into Late Antiquity, and in many ways emblematising this empire and its benedictions, the Qur'ān is a late antique product, unthinkable without the broader history of the period.

*Retrospective and prospective
Islam in Late Antiquity and beyond*

It is not the propagation, but the permanency of his [Muḥammad's]
religion, that deserves our wonder. Edward Gibbon

The preceding chapters have described the ways and means by which the Arabs had begun to gather historical force and an internal political consistency marked by adherence to a new religion, and to induct themselves into the world of Late Antiquity. Once installed in Syria under the Umayyads, they had started to husband possibilities available and to give distinctive form and texture to the socio-religious developments that had marked Paleo-Islam as a period of rapid change. From this point onwards, their history was to be no longer the history of late antique Arabia, but that of the late antique Near East. Resetting the history of empires from where they had left off once the last bout of Roman–Sasanian wars had come to an end and had made the Roman–Sasanian contact area fair game to a canny, talented and rapidly expanding Arab polity, Arabs embarked upon a dynastic career carried by a succession of two dynasties, the Umayyad and the Abbasid. The Sasanians existed from history, and even by the time of the Arab conquest of Syria had been consigned to the memory of previous generations, while with the capture of Syria, Egypt and North Africa, east Rome was ‘destroyed . . . as a truly supraregional power’.¹

Most especially after the consolidation of ‘Abd al-Malik’s authority following the Second Civil War, the region returned to the geo-political pattern displayed in previous historical periods. This was a powerful state of imperial remit centred in the Fertile Crescent and Egypt, with a strong tax base, relying on the deployment of standing armies. In Iranian lands, a pattern of regional factionalisation² persisted and was officially reinstated by the division of the empire by Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809) between

¹ Heather, *Empires*, 380. The author (at 381) prefers to use the term Byzantine to east Roman from the middle of the seventh century, reflecting the sea-change created by the Arabs in the Mediterranean.

² Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall*, 85, 95 ff., and *passim*, with Index, s.v. ‘kūst’.

two of his sons, while the Sasanian cosmopolitan maritime empire was taken over.³ In this sense, Arab-Muslim polities might be seen to have been related to the late antique order in terms of a continuity in the direction of change,⁴ particularly west of Mesopotamia. One difference produced by the merger of two imperial territories was that the disappearance of Rome's eastern frontier transformed a zone of swamps and forts into sustainable agricultural land with a host of new towns serving as emporia and as relays of administration; Qasr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī is an excellent example of this new situation, as well as of the imperial will for central planning, irrespective of its lasting effects.⁵

The most pertinent element that needs to be addressed in view of what Gibbon considered to be worthy of wonder is of course Arab imperialism, which constituted the condition of possibility for the crystallisation in durable and self-perpetuating form of elements of the Paleo-Muslim religion, and their final consecration, from the tenth century onwards, as what was to be known to posterity as classical Islam. In this perspective, for a proper consideration of the move from Paleo-Islam to Islam, the common fixation upon dynastic succession would need to be overridden, with due consideration given to the continuities between the Abbasids and the Umayyads,⁶ and regarding the period of military anarchy at Sāmarrā' (861–870) as a point marking systemic transition. The following pages will give a schematic and selective account of some features of the period under consideration, which might be said to characterise the transition from the field of possibilities that Paleo-Islam was, to the construction of more durable and self-sustaining structures.

It has already been suggested that Islam ought not to be considered as a category of historical explanation, and that Islam has many faces and phases, of which the initial one has been given a specific designator, Paleo-Islam. Later phases and places might also, with the increasing sophistication of historical explanation and the removal of the clutter of received wisdom,

³ Banaji, 'Legacies', 174. ⁴ Morony, *Iraq*, 4.

⁵ Grabar *et al.*, *City in the Desert*, 7, 14, 148. This was the 'failed Brazilia' of the Umayyads, and 'a world of forms in search of functions' (149, 168), similar, as noted by the authors (14), to the more successful Raqqa, al-Kūfa, Qayrawān, Fustāt, and others. On the plan of al-Kūfa, Ju'ayt, *al-Kūfa*, 154 ff., and *ibid.*, 75, 86, 95, on the urbanising will of the Umayyads, leading also to the formation and reconfiguration of clans.

⁶ Of these continuities, Bligh-Abramski ('Evolution', 226 ff.) highlights military and administrative practices, the Umayyad geo-political reorientation towards the east following the failure of campaigns against Constantinople, extensive employment of *mawālī*, the use by Caliphs of private armies, and the practice of appointing potential heirs to the throne to provincial governorships. One might also cite the continuities in the arrangements of the imperial post: Silverstein, *Postal Systems*, 59 and 60 ff.

be given designators more aptly related to times, places, milieux and much else.

Appropriation

The Umayyads were an ambitious and indomitable lot, pursuing what has been described as 'a kind of "political enterpreunialism"' rooted in Arab aristocratic traditions.⁷ Their career in Syria was, until the abandonment of the assaults upon Constantinople following the siege of 716–718, not necessarily concentrated upon Syria as their central ground.⁸ The Arab victory at Sebastopolis in 692, after which no more tribute was paid to Constantinople, was marked by a vigorous renewed expansion, earlier stalled by the Second Civil War, and Constantinople was clearly the expected trophy.⁹ With the Romans having lost some three quarters of their revenues as a result of Arab assaults,¹⁰ the Roman capital had continually been the ultimate aim. Gibb saw in the combination of military assault and administrative adaptation of Roman norms an ambition to set up the dynasty in Constantinople, and also considered that the orientation to the east came only after 718, during the reign of Hishām.¹¹

Inevitably, the Umayyads were concerned with conditions in their home base – without neglecting eastern expansion, the revenues it brought, and the east as the direction for diverting energies emerging from Arabia and the fractious residents of southern Iraq. They were also concerned with the north and with trade with the north emerging from the consolidation and coordination of trade in the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf.¹² There is little evidence of trade between Syria and the east during the Umayyad period.¹³ The monetary bases of the two regions were still distinct. Until the end of

⁷ Banaji, 'Legacies', 170.

⁸ On the maritime campaigns against Constantinople in 664–668 and 716–718, see Eickhoff, *Seekrieg*, 21 ff., 31 ff. Earlier, the menace was so real that in 660–661 the *basileus* abandoned Constantinople for Syracuse and attempted to move the capital. Syracuse was raided by the Arabs in 662–663: Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 486 f.

⁹ Flood, *Great Mosque*, 191.

¹⁰ Hendy, *Studies*, 620. To this must be added the earlier bleeding away of gold, to the East Asian trade in luxury goods, as tribute to the Sasanians and peoples assaulting Rome from the west, and into ecclesiastical thesaurisation: Lombard, *Monnaie*, 139 ff. The church also hoarded silver, some of which was seized by the Sasanians, and some used by Heraclius to support war with the Sasanians, including, after 615, the issue of heavy coinage to pay the military and subsidise allies: Mitchell, *Later Roman Empire*, 416, 418. Much accumulated Sasanian and Roman treasure was released to the Umayyads: Nabaji, 'Legacies', 168.

¹¹ Gibb, 'Arab–Byzantine relations', 232 f. ¹² Heck, *Charlemagne*, 58 ff.

¹³ Morony, 'Trade', 13. On changes in trade routes and goods exchanged in this region during this period, see Morony, 'Commerce', 701 ff.

the ninth century, the evaluation of taxes in the east was expressed in silver, in the west in gold, following the monometallic systems of Roman gold and Sasanian silver of a previous time,¹⁴ with the Roman system spreading gradually over time, later to cover the Indian Ocean as well,¹⁵ and this was correlated with two different regimes for the payment of capitation tax, individual in silver territories and collective in gold territories.¹⁶ The monetary reforms of 'Abd al-Malik were clearly geared towards ensuring in part the convertibility of gold and silver coinage, facilitating the merger of the currency zones in the interests of centralising what had been in effect a bipartite administrative system, and motivated by imperatives of rationalisation, uniformisation and centralisation, no less than technical problems pertaining to dies and iconography.¹⁷

The Arabs had defeated the Sasanians; but the masters of the Arabs, the Umayyads, had on their home ground replaced the Romans, and tended to treat erstwhile Sasanian territories as tributary lands. This Roman connection manifested itself in a variety of ways that betokened Umayyad insertion in late antique imperialism as it will have been understood. It may well be the case that some of their pronouncements of authority had 'a sub-Roman character, with an increasingly Sasanian inflection'. But, as we shall see, we need to agree that the Umayyads had not simply become 'sub-Roman, Syro-Mesopotamian kings'.¹⁸ Their debt to Sasanian administrative norms,¹⁹ real as it is in many details, does generally tend to be exaggerated, and there is evidence of substantive Arab resistance to cultural assimilation to Persian norms, which was to wane only with time.²⁰ At its foundation, the square plan and urban structure of the garrison city of al-Kūfa reflected not the Persian urban heritage (later to be tried in

¹⁴ On the cessation of minting gold currency by the Sasanians, see Lombard, *Monnaie*, 138.

¹⁵ Lombard, *Monnaie*, 151, 155. On the merger of the two currency zones, which should be regarded in a long-term perspective, see Heidemann, 'Merger'.

¹⁶ Cahen, 'Quelques problèmes', 327.

¹⁷ Treadwell, 'Abd al-Malik's coinage reforms', 2, 5 f., and *passim*, where the reforms are sketched with exemplary clarity.

¹⁸ Marsham, *Rituals*, 82.

¹⁹ This matter is normally stated summarily with little attention to local practices, and with greater regard to later administrative manuals and practices. It is well known that administrations in place remained for a century or so. In Egypt, for instance, papyrological evidence shows remarkably uniform continuity until the beginning of the eighth century: Sijpesteijn, 'New rule'; Haldon, 'Greater Syria', 3 f.

²⁰ Morony, *Iraq*, 27, 209 f. On the use of Sasanian statecraft to reinforce Arab norms, *ibid.*, 513 f. The author (at 32 ff.) also clearly brings out the way in which Sasanian theories and practices of government were early on applied, not in Damascus or Medina, but by the governors of Iraq and the East. For a detailed general account on this anxiety of influence, pertaining to Syria, Tannous, *Syria*, 508 ff.

Baghdad at its inception), but rather Hellenistic urbanistic norms.²¹ In all, it would surely be no exaggeration to maintain that, until *c.* 750, the Caliphate 'arguably preserved the parameters of imperial Roman society more completely than any other part of the post-Roman world'.²²

Of manifestations of continuity, the first that might be mentioned was perhaps unintentional, indicating the manner in which the Umayyads inserted themselves fairly effortlessly into structures in place, matters that are generally considered so unremarkable or uninteresting as to rate hardly a mention. The Arab conquest did not mark an economic boundary or threshold between Late Antiquity and the Arab empire, but represented a revival of processes and arrangements that had been weakening: the development of large-scale estates with tenant labour, monetarisation, which in fact accelerated and grew in extent, the development and spread of irrigated agriculture, mining, the emergence of merchant diasporas,²³ and the treatment of state property and crown lands.²⁴ Continuity here indicates that there was not much perceived need to change. Also relevant were regimes of land ownership, with a weak distinction between individual and state property rights, the heritability of property, and the revocable landholding of estates granted by the crown in the case of lands granted in expectation of military allegiance, in continuity with the Roman-Byzantine arrangements of the emphyteutic type, including serious fiscal concessions, but with limited rights to alienation.²⁵ Ultimately, and in terms of the political economy of these arrangements, this amounted to a tributary system subject to politically manipulative redistribution.

One needs to underline the small numbers of Arabs arriving in southern and north-western Syria under the Umayyads, facilitating their insertion into the existing fabric of habitation, and giving it renewed salience and energy; this is evident from archaeological evidence.²⁶ Unsurprisingly, the archaeological record hardly records the momentous events that were the Arab conquest of Syria, with scant evidence of damage to the existing physical fabric, not even at Caesarea which had been taken by storm, the unnecessary assumption of destructiveness having for long been an axiom

²¹ Ju'ayṭ, *al-Kūfa*, 178. ²² Wickham, *Inheritance*, 282, 285 ff.

²³ Morony, 'Economic boundaries'. ²⁴ Morony, *Iraq*, 69 f.

²⁵ Cahen, 'Evolution', 233 f.

²⁶ Foss, 'Syria in transmission', 266. Arab settlement in the region of Damascus was early on confined to the villages outlying the city, some already owned by Jafnids. Grandees only gradually moved into the city proper, occupying properties abandoned by the earlier elite (Shboul, 'Change', 89 ff.). Much of the so-called *musta'riba*, the Arab Byzantine elite, remained, with Jafnids in alliance with Mu'awiya at Siffin, continuing for long to constitute members of the elite (Kennedy, 'Syrian elites', 182, 189, 194 ff.).

of scholarship.²⁷ Intensive cultivation in southern Syria and associated prosperity persisted until c. 750, despite the flight of members of the aristocracy from the time of the Sasanian invasion.²⁸ Any recession in settled areas to the limits of rainfall agriculture was in continuity with earlier trends.²⁹

So also were patterns of architectural design and urban planning, in a situation marked by an accelerated urbanisation, including urban growth,³⁰ particularly the layout of streets, now intruding upon large open areas, as linear markets and unplanned urbanism, but with cities become the foci of commerce.³¹ The office of *agoranomos* or market inspector, in different forms and under different titles, seems to have persisted, ultimately yielding the office of the *muḥtasib*.³² There is evidence of major investment in agricultural projects, including the introduction of new crops such as sugar cane, rice, bananas and indigo,³³ and of continuities in material culture, with modest stylistic developments – pottery, glass, metalwork and stonework.³⁴ There is also evidence of Umayyad urbanism *ex novo*, not least of palace complexes, as in Ramla, ‘Anjar and the famous desert palaces.³⁵ Hishām was attached to al-Ruṣāfa, using the church of St Sergius as a mosque and holding court there, thereby stepping into the shoes of al-Mundhir and Justinian.³⁶

Of visual aspects of such continuity, special mention needs to be made of currency.³⁷ To all intents and purposes, coinage circulating in Umayyad domains retained currency in use already, with some scant iconographic modification, and was to an extent that still needs to be determined dependent on the import of Roman issues. Silver coins minted by governors

²⁷ Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria*, 21 f., 25 f., 47. ²⁸ Foss, ‘Syria’, 240 ff., 261 f.

²⁹ Kennedy, ‘Last century’, 164. For details on settlement patterns, Walmsley, *Syria*, ch. 2.

³⁰ Kennedy, ‘Last century’, 164 f., citing Aleppo and Hama.

³¹ Kennedy, ‘*Polis to Medina*’, 4 f., 12 f., 25 f.

³² Foster, ‘Agoranomos’, *passim*. With regard to urban professional associations, these have generally been seen as a late phenomenon, on the grounds that evidence is lacking, despite the implausibility of their non-existence, asserted as a corollary of certain assumptions about the inchoate nature of ‘the Islamic city’. Yet there are indices for a link between Roman and Arab associations of this type: see, most recently, Brock, ‘Regulations’, 56.

³³ Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria*, 112, 116. ³⁴ Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria*, 70 and ch. 3, *passim*.

³⁵ Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria*, 92 ff., 97 ff., 105 ff.; Flood, *Great Mosque*, 126.

³⁶ Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 181 f. and ch. 6, *passim*.

³⁷ The history of Umayyad coinage is a complex one in a variety of respects, technical as well as historical, and advances have recently been made in its classification, history, metrology, iconography and relation to Umayyad administration, not least in view of work on the very substantial collection of the Ashmolean Museum. For the state of the field in overview, Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge*, 75 ff., 99 ff. There are a number of convenient overviews, some of pioneering and innovative character: Bates, ‘History’, 231 ff., 232 n. 3, 236 f., 238 ff.; Morrisson, ‘Monneyage’, 310 ff.; Heidemann, ‘Evolving representation’, 150 ff. For questions of chronology, Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge*, 106 f.

in erstwhile Sasanian territories retained the images of Khusro II (r. 590–628) and Yazdgird III (r. 632–651) and of fire altars; the names of sovereigns were inscribed in Pahlavi,³⁸ with some additions of Arabic legends certifying validity. The names of Sasanian emperors were phased out from 671, to be replaced by the names of governors, placed alongside the imperial portrait. There is a complex history of the replacement of Sasanian motifs, including the eventual removal of fire altars replaced by the *shahāda* – interpreted as the ‘verbal equivalent of the mutilated cross’ representation (with the horizontal bar removed) on the reverse of Standing Caliph coins.³⁹

But, strictly speaking, this was Umayyad provincial, not metropolitan coinage (with a Zubayrid interlude). Syrian coinage was imported from or modelled upon the Roman, complete with imperial effigies, crosses duly adjusted to remove the horizontal bar, and other designs of ‘bewildering’ variety,⁴⁰ including the ‘experimental’ *mihrāb* and ‘*anaza* type,’⁴¹ showing what is probably a representation of the Caliph holding a stave inside a niche. This culminated in the famous regnal currency of the Standing Caliph type (from c. AH 69) whose iconographic implications will be considered later. Many of these issues were minted for short durations and at a variety of locations; their history of circulation is yet to be established. In North Africa, Umayyad coins until the end of the first Hijra century used legends in Latin translating Arabic phrases.⁴² The *nomisma* of Heraclius, with three standing figures on the obverse, was experimented with by ‘Abd al-Malik, who also used on the reverse a cross on steps with the horizontal bar removed, as had Mu‘āwiya before him.⁴³

The reign of ‘Abd al-Malik displayed a move towards greater central coordination, at least with the minting of gold and silver (copper was iconographically similar, but had a different minting history, including a

³⁸ Many such coins are contained in the Damascus hoard discovered in 1950. Thus Mu‘āwiya *amīr al-mu‘īmin* is rendered on a coin dated AH 41 as *Maawiya amir i-urunishnikān*, and ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr is rendered on a coin of AH 67 as *Abdula i-Zubirān* (al-‘Ushsh, *Silver Hoard*, 170, 178 – ‘Abd al-Malik coins at 171). So also, Mu‘āwiya, in a private collection in Jordan, Goussous, *Coinage*, 15, 34 (Arabic pagination) and pl. 10 and in the British Museum: Walker, *Catalogue*, 1.no. 35. There are many others as well. See Heidemann, ‘Evolving representation’, 165.

³⁹ Treadwell, ‘Qur’ānic inscriptions’, 3. ⁴⁰ Foss, ‘Coinage’, 753.

⁴¹ Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge*, 28. ⁴² Miles, ‘Iconography’, 210.

⁴³ Heidemann, ‘Evolving representation’, 171. The interpretation of this design in terms of a notion of *qutb* identified with kingship, prophethood and priesthood, representing the Axis of the World, with all manner of associations with the cosmos and with the navel of the earth, duly extended from Golgotha to include Mecca as well (Jamil, ‘Caliph’, 11 ff., 15, 47, 56), ingenious as it is, seems to be rather contrived. The use of *qutb* and associated terms in poetry (at 18 ff.) does not seem to justify the connection with iconography sufficiently to warrant this interpretation. See the comments of Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge*, 93, and of Heidemann, ‘Evolving representation’, 179.

history of imitation coins as distinct from official issue),⁴⁴ which is not to say that matters had been entirely haphazard prior to this.⁴⁵ Between 685 and 690, different types of imperial coins were issued at Damascus (Standing Caliph), Ḥimṣ (imperial bust), Baalbek (two human figures) and Tiberias (three figures, like the *solidus* of Heraclius). Most coins were dated by the Hijra calendar. The *shahāda* appears c. 690. Inscribed upon the coins are the names of mints and marks of validation (*jā'iz*, *ṭayyib*, *kalōn*), in addition to legends considered below.⁴⁶

This dependence on Roman models ended when, under 'Abd al-Malik, the internal monetary circuits and the organisational capability of the Umayyads reached such a point as to make independent issues, culminating in the purely epigraphic *dīnār* with a canonical metrology from 697 (gold) and 698 (silver).⁴⁷ The period 690–694 witnessed a centrally coordinated monetary reform, extending the Standing Caliph design to virtually all mints,⁴⁸ with the transformed cross-and-step on the reverse, a design withdrawn from extensive circulation during 697–704, to be replaced definitively with aniconic coins, of very high epigraphic standard,⁴⁹ and with a 'quantum leap' in terms of quantities issued and the geographical extent of use.⁵⁰

In 691, Justinian II refused to accept tribute paid in pieces not bearing the imperial effigy, minted without authorisation, and this seems to have precipitated the overdue decision to make administratively possible the issue of uniform Umayyad coinage. This was spectacularly successful. Clipped-down flans of Umayyad and, later, Abbasid *dirhams* were overstruck in Constantinople just as, earlier, the gold *solidus* had been made into the gold *dīnār* in AH 74.⁵¹

Most dramatic and emblematic of Roman continuity, perhaps, were developments in Damascus, extremely well studied by Barry Flood, a city which, like Aleppo or Jerusalem, was a site of continued and upgraded

⁴⁴ On minting, see the convenient accounts of Foss, 'Coinage', 753 f., and Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge*, 85 ff., and the comment of Nicol, *Sylloge*, 9.

⁴⁵ Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge*, 82, 84, 85 ff., 95 ff.; Bates, 'History', 239 ff.; Foss, 'Coinage', 752.

⁴⁶ For these developments, Treadwell, 'Abd al-Malik's coinage reforms', 11, with 11 ff. for a discussion of scholarship.

⁴⁷ 4.25 g for the gold *dīnār* (down from 4.55 g), 2.9 g for the silver *dirham* (down from 4.2 g): Heidemann, 'Weights', 144. But this may be a retrojection from early ninth-century Iraqi issues: Morisson, 'Monneyage', 313 n. 212.

⁴⁸ Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge*, 82 ff.

⁴⁹ See overall the chronology of Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge*, 94 f., 106 f.

⁵⁰ Treadwell, 'Abd al-Malik's coinage reforms', 17.

⁵¹ Lombard, *Monnaie*, 146 f.; Hendy, *Studies*, 501, 632 n.; Morisson, 'Monneyage', 312.

urbanism.⁵² The centre of the city was redesigned with a body of Constantinopolitan quotations and references anticipating symbolically the capture of the Roman capital, for which al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik had been making preparations prior to his death, at a time of vigorous expansion.⁵³ Al-Walīd's father had allowed the star of the Jafnids to rise at court, bringing with them a decided and intimate dose of Romanity.⁵⁴ The new palatine colonnade/mosque/palace layout of central Damascus echoed both the late antique east Mediterranean commercial city centre as well as the centre of Constantinople, with Hagia Sophia, the Augustaion and the Chalke.⁵⁵ To this system also belonged the Bāb Jayrūn clock, underlining additionally the monarch's capacity to determine time for his subjects.⁵⁶

Architecture and ornament encoded political intent.⁵⁷ It was a message to Umayyad local Syrian, mainly Christian,⁵⁸ subjects, conveying claims of continuity with the erstwhile Roman masters of Syria. The Dome of the Rock, as we saw above, performed a similar function, as did the mosque of 'Amr in al-Fuṣṭāṭ, rebuilt at the command of al-Walīd.⁵⁹ So also were the claims to imperialism and universal hegemony expressed in Umayyad monumental architecture, embodied in al-Walīd's imperial style that we have encountered above as it spread across the empire, but also in smaller, more private projections of oecumenical ambition and claim.⁶⁰ The projection of these ambitions in both public and private media is telling, betokening the conjunction of both public ostentation and private conception. And the projection of new imperial ambitions in an urbanistic, architectural and decorative idiom of local, previously imperial character, will, like the utilisation of Greek and Hellenistic architectural and sculptural idioms

⁵² Cf. Kennedy, '*Polis to Medina*', 4. It is also noteworthy that this was accompanied by improvements in road conditions, irrigation works, the organisation of the postal services and administrative practices: Flood, *Great Mosque*, 185 ff.

⁵³ Flood, *Great Mosque*, 230 f., 234.

⁵⁴ See the discussion of this and of the possible immediate and literary sources of Constantinopolitan architectural, decorative and urbanistic quotations in Flood, *Great Mosque*, 178 f.

⁵⁵ Flood, *Great Mosque*, 158, 163 ff., 226.

⁵⁶ Flood, *Great Mosque*, 137. ⁵⁷ Flood, *Great Mosque*, 231.

⁵⁸ There is evidence for some sporadic and individual resistance to Arab hegemony expressed in terms of public hostility to Islam, resulting in deliberate martyrdom. See Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 573, 577; Haddad, *Trinité divine*, 28 n. 14; and the detail in Tannous, *Syria*, 445 ff.

⁵⁹ Flood, *Great Mosque*, 223. In line with a very common view, the author (at 223 f., and ch. 2, *passim*) tends to interpret the mosaics at the Umayyad mosque in Damascus as representations of Paradise. I find this interpretation unsatisfying and unjustifiably over-interpretative; there seems no reason to assume a priori that a magnificent decorative motif needs to 'mean' or represent anything beyond its presence. Flood does (at 224 f.) raise the question of whether these were accessible to the audience for which they were aimed ostensibly.

⁶⁰ See Flood, *Great Mosque*, 184 ff., 192 ff., for the elements of this imperial style, used by other Umayyads as well (at 221).

in Augustan Rome, have betokened not only the equivalence of the old and new masters of these idioms, but also the superiority of the newer appropriator.⁶¹

Of the private expressions of such proclamations of universal monarchy, none is more eloquent than Quṣayr 'Amra, a building recently studied and interpreted in considerable detail by Garth Fowden.⁶² This charming hunting lodge and garconnière was, according to an inscription uncovered recently by restoration work,⁶³ built by the ebullient libertine al-Walīd b. Yazīd (r. 743–744) as he was waiting in the wings to succeed his detested cross-eyed uncle, the stern and tight-fisted, but extraordinarily able Caliph Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik.⁶⁴

There is no call here to discuss the building and its frescoes, some clumsy and rather crude in execution, and we need to focus on elements of triumphalism, or triumphalist aspiration by the Caliph in waiting, as embodied in what should be seen as a visual *translatio imperii*.⁶⁵ The style and the motifs overall are determinedly late antique and Hellenistic: a fully indigenous Hellenism, not so much a sign of Paleo-Muslim toleration, nor a surreptitious medium for the expression of forbidden pleasures and private vices, but a sign of the world of the Umayyads.⁶⁶ Quṣayr 'Amra used Greek, along with Arabic, as an epigraphic medium. Greek, which had a dominant position in Syria south of Ḥims, persisted among the elite although it was considerably weakened as a literary language after 662.⁶⁷ Interestingly, with the inscription of the names of non-Arab kings mentioned below, these were rendered as Greek transliterations of the Arabic forms.⁶⁸ It would not be unreasonable to suppose that the use of Greek epigraphy was, despite official Arabisation, still regarded as an emblem of royalty.

⁶¹ Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 334 f.

⁶² Fowden, *Quṣayr 'Amra*. The mural images are published in full in Vibert-Guigue and Bisheh, *Peintures*.

⁶³ www.artdaily.org (3 Feb. 2013).

⁶⁴ On the identity of the builders and patron of this building, and for a lively account of Umayyad family relations and antipathies during the relevant period, see Fowden, *Quṣayr 'Amra*, ch. 5. On Hishām as administrator, and his relations with his nephew, TAB, 1433, 1437 f.; on al-Walīd's libertinism, clearly with much exaggeration and gossip, TAB, 1436 f. One might explain the construction of some Umayyad desert palaces by the need of some princes to be unseen by court, perhaps to manage clandestine political contacts: TAB, 1435, and the excellent analysis of Fowden, *Quṣayr 'Amra*, 283 ff., which brings in a number of crucial interpretative factors.

⁶⁵ Cf. Flood, *Great Mosque*, 234. The ideological message of Quṣayr 'Amra is discussed in synoptic compass by Marsham, *Rituals*, 126 ff.

⁶⁶ Cf. Bowersock, *Hellenism*, 79.

⁶⁷ Gatier, 'Inscriptions', 146, 152 f.

⁶⁸ Fowden, *Quṣayr 'Amra*, 204 f.

Of particular interest are the inscription of *Nikē*, Victory, the fresco of a ruler seated in an alcove, and the fresco of the six kings.⁶⁹ Fowden shows, conclusively in my view, the paradigmatic correlation between the fresco of the seated prince or ruler in Qusayr 'Amra, depicted frontally, and images of Roman emperors current from the late third century and particularly popular in the mid eighth century. This depiction bears definite relations to the image of the enthroned Christ, and iconographic allusions to images of Adam (some in Syria), the first Caliph of God according to the Qur'an, here figuring as the precursor and allegorically the ancestor of the Umayyad Caliph in waiting; the Qur'an had already drawn an analogy between Adam and Christ (Q, 3.59).⁷⁰ This was by no means a unique Umayyad occurrence of these iconographic motifs; there are close analogues at Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbī. Correlated to Umayyad poetry, and with the iconography of a footstool before the seated prince, we have here an image of the universal rule of a sacral king with cosmic resonances.⁷¹

To this needs to be added a scheme of *translatio imperii* and the inheritance of the world by the Umayyads: the reference to Victory, *Nikē*, and possibly also to *Sara nikē*, Saracenic victory,⁷² and the fresco of the six kings, with vexatiously angelical aspects.⁷³ If the reading *Sara nikē* be admitted,⁷⁴ it would convey a raffish message to the basileus, in a manner not uncharacteristic of al-Walīd. The fresco of the six kings,⁷⁵ depicting the Caesar of the Romans,⁷⁶ Khusro of the Sasanians, the Negus of Ethiopia, Roderick of the Visigoths,⁷⁷ the Khaqan of the Khazars, and possibly the king of China

⁶⁹ Discussed in detail, including details of uncertainties of interpretation, by Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra*, 191 ff., chs. 4 and 7.

⁷⁰ Samir ('Theological Christian influence', 146 ff.) brings out the parallelism with Patristic literature, with the use of Paul as a *topos*.

⁷¹ Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra*, 121 ff., 136 ff.

⁷² This reading is controverted, and possibly undecidable, given the degeneration of the inscriptions, owing in some measure to the interferences and 'restorations' by European students of the site over the past century, and certain formal uncertainties: Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra*, xxii, 191 f.

⁷³ Images: Vibert-Guigue and Bisheh, *Peintures*, pl. 142 a and b; colour restitution on pl. 118.

⁷⁴ Image: Vibert-Guigue and Bisheh, *Peintures*, pl. 140 b, d and e.

⁷⁵ Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra*, ch. 7, *passim*, including a discussion of the iconography and iconographic parallels and precedents, and relevant literary sources aiding interpretation. The nomenclature and linguistic characteristics of the names given to the kings in Arabic and Greek inscriptions are discussed at 203–7.

⁷⁶ The reading of Qaysar as a later identity for a personage originally identified as al-Muqawqis (Littmann, 'Mukaukis', followed by di Branco, 'I sei principi') on dubious grounds is not borne out by the detailed tracings in Vibert-Guigue and Bisheh, *Peintures*, pl. 148–9. (I thank G. Fowden for alerting me to this.)

⁷⁷ The inscription of this name below the image is much damaged, owing in good measure to tampering by art historians, and the reading for Roderick, Ludhriq, had been disputed on the grounds that only the terminal letter remains, in the form of a *wāw* (Grabar, Review of Vibert-Guigue, *Peintures*,

(the names of the last two have disappeared from the panel), is not unconnected to the image of the Umayyad Caliph placed in a superordinate position. The Umayyad prince, standing for the dynasty, annexed previous histories of monarchy at a moment of triumph and imperial translation, universal kingship seized or about to be seized from erstwhile empires and lesser states of immediate interest to the Umayyads (the recently vanquished Visigoths and the Aksumites, the latter in all probability of some historical relevance to Meccans and Yemenis⁷⁸ important in Syrian politics). Al-Walid also declared himself, in a poem, to be the rightful descendant not only of Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, his grandfather and the father of 'Abd al-Malik, and the founder of his dynastic line, but also of Khusro and Caesar.⁷⁹

In a parallel development which assimilated Jewish and Christian mythical and prophetic lore, the emergent Muslim religion developed luxuriantly the Qur'ānic notion of itself as the final in a series of previous revelations, all valid in being figures of the primeval truth of monotheism originally held by Abraham, and patronised the incipient constitution of this material into a connected narrative of salvation history.⁸⁰ In this history of the future, the kingdoms of both Earth and Heaven were now joined, by a *translatio imperii*, in Damascus and Baghdad, after they had been joined in Constantinople, continuing to loom as a horizon, and about to enter into the register of eschatology.

There may be detected here some echo of the Byzantine theories of the four monarchies and of the family of princes, with foreign but subaltern sovereigns adopted as friends or as sons, with antecedents in Rome, Persia and Ptolemaic Egypt.⁸¹ The ancient theory of the succession of monarchies, in fact of world dominions, figures not so much as a historiographic motif and device of periodisation, but more as an ideological motif of immediate

392, reaffirmed by Bowersock, 'Old and New Rome', 48 n. 2). This doubt is vicarious; it seems unnecessary, and the forms of the *wāw* and the *qāf* in terminal position in Umayyad epigraphy are not readily distinguishable, as maintained by G. Fowden (personal communication, quoting Gruendler, *Arabic Scripts*, 87, 111).

⁷⁸ Fowden, *Qusa'ir 'Amra*, 211 f. ⁷⁹ Al-Azmeh, *Kingship*, 67 f.

⁸⁰ Al-'Azma, *al-Kitāba at-Tārikhiyya*, 108 ff. Assimilated were also the prophecies of Daniel (al-Sharfi, *al-Fikr al-Islāmi*, 501 f.), but much more: most particularly among Proto-Shī'ī dissident groups, typological use of the figure of 'Alī was much in evidence, with certain connections with Jewish messianism, during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik and later (Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 46, 55 ff., 68 ff. for the 'Isāwiyya). For an impression of the mythical, eschatological and salvation historical interest of dissident Proto-Shī'ī groups, see Tucker, *Mahdis*, who, despite a rather conventional view of these movements overall, shows (at 21 f.) that they were not confined to the *mawālī*, which is a common presumption, but involved many Arabs as well.

⁸¹ Grabar, *Iconoclasm*, 115 ff. The theory was to be long-lived: Dölger, 'Familie'. For the panel of the six kings in this regard, Fowden, *Qusa'ir 'Amra*, 222.

and practical sense.⁸² The Arab Alexander legend, which survived for very long and has a most interesting history, dwells upon the theme of universal kingship in conjunction with prophecy as an ancient historical trope.⁸³

More proximately, Syriac authors in the seventh century construed the kingdom of the Arabs as the successor of Roman and Sasanian reign. In addition, Caliphs were generally designated by them as kings, *malkūta*, and Isho'yahb used the term *shallīṭā rabbā* for the Caliph 'Uthmān, drawing upon technical vocabularies used for descriptions of Roman and Sasanian rule, with governors termed *shallīṭā* or *amīrā*.⁸⁴ Clearly, there is a connection here with the theory of imperial translation in its Christian redaction, which used the Book of Daniel as a proof text. These ideas were clearly in the air. For the rest, the precise manner of their wider spread and incidence still awaits further research; they cannot have been confined entirely to the royal elite, not least as the Syrian subjects, including many Arab elements among them, had been for centuries acculturated into the imperial norms of Romanity.⁸⁵

Distinction

Yet, for all these appropriations, many quite deliberate, and many suitably modified with the acquisition of an Arab syntax, the Umayyads not only were the inheritors of the late antique eastern Mediterranean and of territories farther east, but also acquired proprietorial rights.⁸⁶ They were the inheritors of Rome, but also operated under another signature, one defined by aristocratic Arab ethnicity and by Paleo-Islam. That they were not sub-Roman is testimony to the social and ideological coherence of the elite, a matter already brought up in [chapter 6](#) above. They appropriated much of what had been Rome, but they also purveyed, in public and in private, motifs and tokens of distinctiveness.

For one thing, the idea of universal dominion and œcumenical inheritance was sustained in Arab aetiological terms also. An ancient Arab legend

⁸² The theory of the four monarchies was ubiquitous in Antiquity and Late Antiquity, and Christian salvation history as well, and persisted until early modern times: Swain, 'Theory of the four monarchies' and Hübinger, *Spätantike*, 6–15. It also makes a Talmudic appearance: Swain, 'Theory of the four monarchies', 16 n. 40.

⁸³ De Polignac, 'Cosmocrator'.

⁸⁴ Brock, 'Syriac views', 14. Apocalyptic texts identified the Arabs with the Assyrians/Babylonians of salvation history: Suermann, *Reaktion*, 224. A Sibylline Oracle (14.317 ff.) referred to the Arab invasion of Alexandria.

⁸⁵ Cf. the brief comments of Fowden, *Quṣayr 'Amra*, 263 f., who also discusses possible mythological themes in the frescoes of the building (at 257 ff.).

⁸⁶ See especially the very fine analysis of Fowden, *Quṣayr 'Amra*, ch. 10.

spoke of Ṣafī b. al-Nabīṭ, a grandson of Ishmael and the thirty-fifth ancestor of Ma'add, said to have been loftier than Caesar and Heraclius, according to a poem by Umayya b. Abī al-Salt of which only one line survives.⁸⁷ There are legends of Mu'āwiya's rule having been foretold – and therefore, one presumes, pre-ordained – in Yemen,⁸⁸ and one might fairly presume, pending research, that this legend is of Umayyad vintage. Aetiological myths of Arab kingship, with Quṣayy as the first king, were also present,⁸⁹ also possibly of Umayyad vintage.

More systematically, and as a preliminary register of continuous monarchical history,⁹⁰ the pseudo-history of Yemen composed for Mu'āwiya by 'Ubayd b. Sharyah, was construed as a connected chronology of universal Arab dominion in ancient times, spearheaded by Yemeni sovereigns,⁹¹ who by then were being subjected to Arabisation in the emergent systematisation of genealogies. For each epoch, 'Ubayd cites a universal sovereign,⁹² constructing a continuous chronology, and quoting Qur'ānic proof texts in confirmation.⁹³ The paradigmatic universal ruler Alexander founded his eponymous city where an antediluvian city had already been founded by the Arab Shaddād b. 'Ād.⁹⁴ Mu'āwiya claimed this universal Arab inheritance of Yemeni monarchy to himself and his dynasty: God translated to them the kingship of ancient Ḥimyar, and delivered the world to them in the process.⁹⁵ Indeed, there was a tendency, growing through the Umayyad era, for a variety of groups to assimilate their distant genealogies to the Ḥimyarites,⁹⁶ often taken as a blanket designator of southern, Yemeni Arabs, prior to their migrations to the north, real or imagined.

In this sense, with the inheritance of universal rule, both Mu'āwiya and 'Abd al-Malik (and Umayyad panegyrists in general)⁹⁷ were able to state that their rule was the work of Time: 'we are Time, whoever we elevate is elevated, whoever we bring down is brought down', according to a letter by Mu'āwiya. The same motif of Time elevating and bringing down is attributed to 'Abd al-Malik as well.⁹⁸

This motif was also brought into intimate connection with the beginnings of Muslim theology under the Umayyads, with the elevation of mythopoetic representations to a theoretical and discursive register, with

⁸⁷ Umayya b. Abī al-Salt, *Dīwān*, 35. ⁸⁸ *SH*, 3.136. ⁸⁹ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 1.240.

⁹⁰ It will be remembered that Mu'āwiya ordered that 'Ubayd's account be committed to writing, to be kept on record: Khoury, 'Kalif', 214 f.

⁹¹ See the comments of Cheddadi, *Arabes*, 56 ff. ⁹² *Akhbār 'Ubayd*, 336, and *passim*.

⁹³ *Akhbār 'Ubayd*, 338, and *passim*. ⁹⁴ De Polignac, 'Cosmocrator', 152.

⁹⁵ *Akhbār 'Ubayd*, 484. ⁹⁶ *AGH*, 8.66 f.

⁹⁷ Most notably for this idiom, al-Nābigha al-Shaybānī: Rūmiyya, *al-Qaṣida*, 495 ff.

⁹⁸ *TAB*, 1279; al-Drūbī and Jarrār, *Jamhara*, 31, no. 4.

the dispute between predestinarianism and what, for the lack of a better term, might be designated as an emergent doctrine of free will, more in Iraq than in Syria as the former displayed greater theological verve, and more towards the end of Umayyad rule than hitherto.⁹⁹ Both panegryrists and budding pro-Umayyad theologians thought the dynasty was the work of fate, although terms that were later to become technical terms in theology, *qadar* and *qadā'* were used as well.¹⁰⁰

Of course, theologians would conjugate the political workings of Time and of Fortune in terms of divine will, after the manner of the Qur'ān. But in a different register, the Umayyads would stand in as the efficient cause for the workings of both the deliberative deity and blind fortune. Their relationship to God was direct and unmediated, being, in the manner of late antique political theologies, His undeclared but nevertheless real analogues and doubles, relating to Him as an icon relates to its prototype, conveying prototypical energy and conjuring prototypical presence.

This was unremarkable, of course, and in line with late antique polities. But at the heart of what is distinctive in this particular hubristic conceit was the Caliphate of God, *khilāfat Allāh*, hubris of this order itself being a mark of monarchical dominion. It was activated both as a conception of sublime office, and in ceremonial dramaturgy which deployed distance and terror before the transcendence of the monarch, as a kind of mobile iconography of power which was to deepen with time until reaching its accomplished form by mid-Abbasid times.¹⁰¹

None of this is generically distinctive, nor do any of these matters constitute a *differentia* with regard to late antique monarchy. The distinctiveness came with genealogy, specifically Muḥammadan but added onto a more distant pan-Arab genealogy in which the Ḥimyarites were construed as emblematic of universal Arab kingship in times past. For now, some observations on the legatees of God, *khulafā' Allāh*,¹⁰² are in order. Late antique

⁹⁹ *TG*, 1.27, 129. One could find in these debates, between Muslims and between Muslims and Christians, as a literary genre, the beginnings of Muslim theology (van Ess, *Anfänge*, 12 f.; *TG*, 1.47 f., 49, 50 f., 52 f.; Haddad, *Trinité divine*, 26 ff.). For aspects of setting, chronology and provenance of early Muslim dogmatic developments, van Ess, *Anfänge* and Cook, *Dogma*.

¹⁰⁰ Van Ess, *Zwischen*, 181 f. ¹⁰¹ Al-Azmeh, *Kingship*, 132 ff.

¹⁰² Material for this theme is assembled in Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, *passim*. For an analysis of the material, al-Azmeh, *Kingship*, 74 ff. The title was used very early on; there is reference to 'Uthmān as Khalīfat Allāh (Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 6; Madelung, *Succession*, 80) and, prior to that, on a coin minted during the reign of 'Umar and held at the National Museum in Damascus carrying the legend *Khalīfat Allāh* (*al-Maskūkāt*, 16), and a reference to 'Umar as such (Hakim, 'Context'). For his part, 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr used the title Legatee of God's Apostle, *Khalīfat Rasūl Allāh* (Rotter, *Umayyaden*, 34 f.): 'Abd al-Malik said of him that he prayed too long and fasted too often, and that for this and his tight-fistedness he could never have made a passable ruler (TAB, 1280).

monarchs were in a different way legatees of God, and it has been suggested that there was a subtle interplay of analogies between monarch, cosmocrator and monotheistic deity which may not have been dogmatically admissible, but was nevertheless effective, not least in that it tended to work by suggestion and mimetic transfers to efface practical distinctions of worldly energy.¹⁰³

In this context, it is unsurprising that God and Caliph might be seen to have entered into 'a subtle struggle for preeminence'.¹⁰⁴ This view is somewhat overstated, by a conflation of the conceptual and discursive registers on the one hand, and by the pragmatic register on the other. Yet it indicates a subtle and undeclared jockeying, all the while Caliph and God sharing a number of epithets and capacities. Among other things, Mu'āwīya, 'Abd al-Malik and his son al-Walīd delivered sermons at the Apostle's *minbar* in Medina while seated; the second among them had his guards arrayed in two lines around him.¹⁰⁵ The Caliph was a saviour, a rain-maker, a resplendent sun, and had a broad panoply of attributes most eloquently expressed in Umayyad and Abbasid panegyric poetry.¹⁰⁶ The Caliph's treasury was God's, his army God's, his enemies God's enemies;¹⁰⁷ his victory, needless to say, was a sign of divine election, and perhaps evidentiary demonstration of this as well.¹⁰⁸ He was God's legatee, *Khalīfat Allāh*, not just as a term of flattery, but as official designation and a component in official documents and Caliphal correspondence as well, and on Umayyad coins.¹⁰⁹

Flattery itself needs to be seen in a ceremonial context of sacral kingship, court panegyric, reciprocated by gifts and largesse, prompting the material presence of the Caliph and his capacities by some mimetic analogy, in the physical absence of God.¹¹⁰ Among other things, the magical aspect of the Caliphal person is signified by 'Abd al-Malik's capacity to produce

¹⁰³ Al-Azmeh, *Kingship*, 29 ff; *Times*, 268 ff. ¹⁰⁴ Ali, 'Early Islam', 20. ¹⁰⁵ TAB, 1296.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Azmeh, *Kingship*, 77 f.; Rūmīya, *al-Qaṣīda*, 165 ff., 183 ff. The Shī'i poet al-Sayyid al-Himiyari described the Abbasid al-Manṣūr (r. 754–775) as Khalīfat al-Raḥmān and, with a more decided Shī'i sense, as al-Qā'im (*AGH*, 7.196). The concordances between the Shī'i *imām* and God's Caliph are manifest, and were to develop an elaborate theology of history and to have cosmic proportions: al-Azmeh, *Kingship*, 76, 160 f., 190 ff.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Azmeh, *Kingship*, 73, 233 n. 49. ¹⁰⁸ Stetkevych, 'Umayyad panegyrics', 108.

¹⁰⁹ Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 6 ff.; for Abbasids, 13 ff. For coins, where this title appears from 694–695, see for instance Walker, *Catalogue*, 1.24, 25, 2.xxxvi; Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge*, 94; Heidemann, 'Evolving representation', 176 f.

¹¹⁰ Stetkevych, 'Umayyad panegyric', 97; Ali, 'Early Islam', 20, 21 f.; Marsham, *Rituals*, ch. 4, *passim*. On the ceremonial ambience of the Umayyads, and their accumulation of emblems of royalty, including rarities, manners of dress, ceremonial distance and the radiation terror, al-Azmeh, *Kingship*, 67 ff. (for the more elaborate Abbasid institutes, 131 ff.), and Bin Ḥusayn, *al-Dawla*, 230 ff.

medicinal talismans,¹¹¹ and the graves of both Mu‘āwiya and of Yazīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik were used as asylum for persons fleeing the wrath of reigning Caliphs.¹¹² When summoned by al-Walīd b. Yazīd, Ḥammād al-Rāwīya added *labbayka* to his greeting,¹¹³ which was to become common. These late antique tropes of kingship were ubiquitous; the panegyric poetry of al-A‘shā, for one, constitutes earlier Arab testimony to the assimilation of kings at once to exemplary piety and to hallowed presences.¹¹⁴ Overall, court panegyric, exemplified by al-Akhṭal, conjoined the themes of divine commission with those of genealogy, weaving the past into a consolidated historical experience not unlike the epic.¹¹⁵

Over and above this direct relationship to God and to hoary Arabdom, Caliphs also entertained an increasingly clear relationship to Muḥammad. As God’s Caliphs, Umayyad monarchs acted as independent agents of God, but without this necessarily betokening theoretical parity with the Apostle, a parity nevertheless clear functionally.¹¹⁶ It is hard to tell if the entourage of ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ (against his advice) let out only a slip of the tongue when they addressed Mu‘āwiya as Rasūl Allāh,¹¹⁷ or if they were simply insufficiently aware of the distinction between Muḥammad as legatee, and the Caliph as legatee, a distinction of the historico-theological, not of the political order. Be that as it may, what clearly emerges is that the Umayyads were operating with increasingly composite theologico-historical genealogies.

Umayyad monarchs habitually referred to themselves as Amīr al-Mu‘minīn (not Amīr al-Muslimīn, significant in view of our previous discussion of Paleo-Muslim self-designation in [chapter 6](#) above), and as ‘Abd Allāh.¹¹⁸ Moreover, God’s appointment of Caliphs as His legatees is conjugated in sequence with His prior election of angels as messengers and apostles (the first of whom was Adam), his sending forth Muḥammad as an Apostle, and his delegation of the affairs of the world to Caliphs who are to follow the path of prophecy. So according to a public missive by al-Walīd b. Yazīd,¹¹⁹ Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiya stated that God had first appointed Abū

¹¹¹ AGH, 15.119 f.

¹¹² AGH, 7.15, 17.9. This protective capacity was not confined to Caliphal graves, but applied also to those of other distinguished individuals (for instance, Ṣa‘sa‘a b. ‘Iqāl, the grandfather of the poet al-Farazdaq, and his son Ghālib: AGH, 21.248 f., 279; Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishtiqāq*, 239 f.), in line with ancient Arabian practice already considered.

¹¹³ AGH, 7.37. ¹¹⁴ Al-A‘shā, *Dīwān*, 5.62–4, 70.5.

¹¹⁵ Stetkevych, ‘Umayyad panegyric’, 91, with reference to al-Akhṭal’s panegyric ode to ‘Abd al-Malik following his triumph in the Second Civil War, the famous *khaffa l-qaṭīn*.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Crone and Hinds, *God’s Caliph*, 28 ff. ¹¹⁷ TAB, 1004.

¹¹⁸ Both appear on one of the early Arabic inscriptions, dated 58/677–678, on a dam built at the command of Mu‘āwiya at al-Ṭā‘if: Miles, ‘Inscriptions’, 237, lines 1–2.

¹¹⁹ TAB, 1440. See the comments of Crone and Hinds, *God’s Caliph*, 26 f.

Bakr, then ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān, followed seamlessly by the Umayyads.¹²⁰ Alongside the line of divine delegation, there were others – inheritance of erstwhile empires, illustrated above with reference to Quṣayr ‘Amra and al-Walīd, inheritance of Arab universal kingship, and the inheritance of the Umayyad clan, well illustrated by another poem by al-Walīd mentioning, among others, ‘Uthmān, Marwān, Fihrr, and of course Muḥammad.¹²¹

But Muḥammad was more than a kinsman of the Umayyads. The transmission of his charisma was to grow distinctive with time, and this brings us to the public religion of the Umayyads and their public construal of their religion, preparing the ground for Islam fully blown. Over time, as Caliphs became mimetically Muḥammadanised, the Apostle himself became progressively more royalised, ultimately with an expression of this royalisation in the architecture, staff and ceremonial of his tomb at Medina.¹²² In the fullness of time, and with the growth of the doctrine of Muḥammadan inerrance and impeccability, in competition with Imāmism, his figure was to acquire a position at the intersection of the homologous notions of Umayyad Caliph as legatee of God, and of Shī‘ite *imām*, also God’s legatee, the latter an idea born in the same milieu (but messianised among a variety of groups and in some regions), with time domesticated, and later formulated in dogmatic terms.¹²³ At the apogee of Shī‘ite influence in the central lands of the Caliphate, around the eleventh century, this amounted to what needs to be seen as a secondary Shī‘isation of the prophetic figure by the Sunnī Ayyūbids and Mamlūks.¹²⁴ The common assumption that the Umayyads were ‘secular’ rulers is manifestly wrong, as has been recognised for more than a century.¹²⁵ Clearly, at the time of ‘Abd al-Malik, the Umayyads propagated a public Islam on a variety of media – inscriptions, coins, seals, papyri – in very large numbers characterised by a relative uniformity of language and of formulaism.¹²⁶ The Dome of the Rock and monumental mosques are part of this same move, although it is interesting to note that no mosques were built without there being an actual congregational need for them.¹²⁷

Apart from the Caliphate of God, central to this development of the public announcement of religion was the figure of the Apostle. He ‘made

¹²⁰ Al-Sijistānī, *al-Maṣābiḥ*, 11 f. As expected, there is no mention of ‘Alī.

¹²¹ AGH, 7.8. ¹²² Al-Azmeh, *Kingship*, 76 f. ¹²³ Al-Azmeh, *Kingship*, 76, 161 f., 182.

¹²⁴ Cf. the comments of Widengren, *Muhammad*, 214, in the broad context of sacral kingship in the Near East.

¹²⁵ Letter from Nöldeke to Goldziher, 24 October 1890 (Simon, *Goldziher*, no. 4, 171).

¹²⁶ Robinson, *Abd al-Malik*, 113 ff., for an overview in terms of recent scholarship; Hoyland, ‘Content and context’, 91 f.

¹²⁷ Flood, *Great Mosque*, 184.

his debut' on two Arab-Sasanian coins from Bīshāpūr in Fārs dated 66 and 67/685–6 and 686–7, issued by Ibn 'Āmir, representative of Ibn al-Zubayr and his brother-in-law,¹²⁸ and the view now commonly accepted is that the move by 'Abd al-Malik towards a more public pronouncement of his religion, and towards the dissemination of a religious policy, was impelled by the appeal to religion by his adversaries during the Second Civil War, including victory over the Kharijites.¹²⁹ Before that time, no recognisable physical indications of this religion existed, apart from mosques and the sharing of churches. Yet from around AH 70 and throughout the 690s, quotations from the Qur'ān in a variety of media began to proliferate,¹³⁰ at the time when the Book was being orthographically and otherwise upgraded.

Quite apart from references to Ibn al-Zubayr, with the elevation of Islam to the official name of the state religion and the growing centrality of the Muḥammadan genealogy, it has been asked, quite legitimately, what it was that Umayyads were changing *from*, at the same time being careful not to give the impression that the new religion had been only superficially adopted.¹³¹ The answer can only be that what the Umayyads were starting to change from as they began to inscribe their religion in stone was Paleo-Islam, and that the reason they decided, under 'Abd al-Malik, to make public proclamations of religion was that this religion had by now become sufficiently established to make this possible and imperative.

This is not least in view of the question of *Islām* and *Īmān* discussed above. The Umayyads had been elected by God to rule universally. As a corollary, a statement such as that of al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya (d. between 705 and 720), that not all of humanity was called to *Īmān*,¹³² salvation being restricted to a circle of Arabs, now oecumenical masters, was becoming anachronistic. Islam was now the religion of a universal state, not of the ruling caste only, and this transition, often attributed to the time of the Abbasids, did in fact pre-date them, and their integration of elements of the local population was in line with a prior, Umayyad trend.

In light of the foregoing considerations, it would be appropriate to assert that the development of Islam, inaugurated formally by 'Abd al-Malik,

¹²⁸ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 552 f.; 'Documentary texts', 397.

¹²⁹ See Heidemann, 'Evolving representation', 184 f.

¹³⁰ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 550 ff.; 'Content and context', 91–2 n. 90.

¹³¹ Hoyland, 'Documentary texts', 397; 'Content and context', 96

¹³² Van Ess, *Anfänge*, 92 and Arabic text, § 28. See also 'al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya', *EL*. Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 5554 f.

betokened the transition of Paleo-Islam from being a cultic association based on geographical and genealogical proximities, coherences and intimacies, to the religion of an imperial state responding to a vast change of scale requiring the construction of virtual connections and greater formalisation of social relations and their religious-cultic correlates. Paleo-Islam was, as we have seen, constructed partly of a habitus of ritual and idiom, with time partly routinised under conditions of intensive and direct interaction and conflict. With the disengagement of a ruling class properly so called, and the vast spatial dilation of this polity and the dispersal of its human armature across territories with very differing conditions, a new kind of habitus was called for, one based upon an abstract point of reference, set up at a mythological distance, beyond the pressure of evolving circumstance. A skeleton of habit was required to uphold the frame of a polity: such emerged, with time, with the formalisation of ideological reference to the Apostle, with a formality allowing for great diversity, based upon exegetical and other interpretative possibilities, reflected, in the fullness of time, in divergences within what was to become Muslim law, theology, exegesis, all authentically Islamic because all equally Muḥammadan, buttressed by proof-texts relating the Apostle's words and deeds. With historical distance from Muḥammad, and with much water having flowed under the bridge since his lifetime, he could now be construed not only as the fount of abiding and renewed charisma through a virtual cult of the Prophet, but also as the topos around which the routinisation of charisma – Muḥammadan, Umayyad and later Abbasid – could be woven.

In short, Muḥammad was henceforth to figure as the emblematic founder, acquiring the usual lineaments of an eponymous and aetiological hero¹³³ in an epic romance, involved in a sense of history that preserved much veridic material, some retrieved by antiquarians, but one that also worked towards the construction of a discourse on a past that was not only epical, but also mythical. Muḥammad the hero was emblematised in the *maghāzī* sections of the *sīra*. This began with al-Zuhrī, rapidly to be inserted into a mythical narrative, salvation-historically and typologically recorded

¹³³ This had been well noted by the theologian Ibn al-Rīwandī, as well noted by van Ess, 'Ibn al-Rīwandī', 16. The theme of aetiological heroes, and of Muḥammad (and Abraham) after this cast, was to be profusely developed in Muslim historiographic and other traditions, but still requires proper research and investigation; it lies at the heart of histories and catalogues of *awā'il*, 'firsts', on which see al-ʿAzma, *al-Kitāba al-tārākhīyya*, 99 ff. The theme is ubiquitous, well developed in Greece and Rome, with some intimations in the Old Testament (Thraede, 'Erfinder', 1241, and *passim*). It was also profusely deployed in Christian historiography, including heresiography (on which see the excellent account of Schott, 'Heresiology', 558 ff.).

in the *mubtada*' of the *sīra* and in works of the history of Prophecy,¹³⁴ the whole lot encrusted with premonitions, anticipations, wonders and miracles. He was the hero of an ongoing imperial concern, a figuration made into an obvious, perhaps an inevitable, option by the variety of genealogical connections discussed above. It might be said that this new figuration of Muḥammad constituted a move from the immediate, concrete, constrained and personalised preoccupations of a small and expanding cultic association and ruling caste and its leaders that was the element of Paleo-Islam, to the limitless possibilities and freedoms afforded by an emblematic genealogy, affording an abstract point of reference, in this sense impersonal and rational, as was required by the vast change of scale from Arabian beginnings to empire. A sense of history over and above immediate preoccupations is a crucial constituent of this transition to Islam, and what made this both possible and imperative was empire.

With this in mind, it is noteworthy that Dionysius of Tell Mahre, writing in 774, was not far wrong in stating that Muḥammad was the first king of the Arabs.¹³⁵ Although a formulation such as this is not to be found in the extant Arab sources, it is conceptually implicit in the various genealogical schemes mentioned above, in which Muḥammad came to play an increasingly pivotal role, he being the founder of the first polity that launched the Umayyads to the head of a movement of expansion and empire building. The state was the state of the Arabs, just as the Roman state was the state of the Romans.

It has been suggested above that there was a mutual grafting and transfer of attributes between Prophet and Caliph. Legislative authority was one such important attribute. Just as Muḥammad and his immediate successors had the authority to legislate, and to adapt, innovate and abolish arrangements and customs in place in the name of an incipient rationalising tendency of an emergent and rapidly expanding polity, so did the Umayyad Caliphs rule by issuing edicts.¹³⁶ The extent to which such edicts had a systemic and general effect across the empire is yet to be determined, but the

¹³⁴ On such typologies, involving Muḥammad and his mother Āmina b. Wahb, Abraham, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, Jesus and Moses, see Fahd, 'Problèmes', 70 ff.

¹³⁵ Palmer, *Seventh Century*, 131.

¹³⁶ Juynboll, 'New ideas', 101 ff.; Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 43 ff., who note (at 53 f.) that Umayyad legislative edicts concerning ritual had virtually disappeared from material that was later to become *ḥadīth*, but we have had occasion to see that they did improvise, and that, especially under al-Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik, a system emerged in sacred spaces whereby patronage, ritual and function were coincident (see Flood, *Great Mosque*, 189). Umayyad practice was not defunct; Crone ('Jāhili and Jewish law', 187 ff.) suggests ways in which Mālikī law was related to it in a variety of respects.

picture to emerge is likely to be highly complex and uneven, as a class of ritual and legal specialists and an imperial legal system were yet incipient, and it might be said that the trends towards legal rationalisation and towards the normative definition of law were yet to crystallise.¹³⁷ Lawmaking by Umayyad-era legists only rarely resorted to prophetic example, referring instead to practice and Caliphal precedent; references to Muḥammad by al-Awzā'ī (d. 774) have the character of confirmatory asides, and *ḥadīth* rarely appears.¹³⁸ It is commonly held that the early Abbasids seem to have arrested the development towards state lawgiving, neglecting the advice of Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. c. 756) that the Caliph enact a code of law binding upon all.¹³⁹ But this view now needs fundamental revision; it is surely insufficient to speak of Muslim law as somehow organically emerging from 'the community' or 'the scholars', without the enabling instance which was the state as it grew towards greater centralisation and rationalisation.¹⁴⁰ Communities, after all, are not causative agencies as such, and are internally structured, differentiated by capacity.

In place of the state, represented by the sovereign, as the ultimate legislative agency, there thus emerged, under socio-political conditions that remain to be investigated, a mode of legislation in terms of prophetic precedent, embodied in a genre of literature called *ḥadīth*, which was superadded to Caliphal legal initiatives and came ideologically to colour classical Muslim law. For the *sunna* of the Caliphs was to be substituted ultimately the *sunna* of Muḥammad, whose record began formally under the patronage of the Caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (r. 717–720),¹⁴¹ to such an extent that, in the second century of the Hijra, there was little significant difference between law-books and books of *ḥadīth*.¹⁴² The *sunna* was to develop from

¹³⁷ Cook (*Commanding Right*, 472 f.) suggests that 'Abd al-Malik's opposition to the general injunction to 'command right' is correlated to his view of the overarching responsibility of the state, which should also be conjugated with the personalisation of legislation at the hands of the Caliph.

¹³⁸ Judd, 'Al-Awzā'ī', 15 f. ¹³⁹ Al-Azmeh, *Kingship*, 101, 238 n. 86; Juynboll, 'New ideas', 105.

¹⁴⁰ This point has been well made by Jokisch, *Imperial Law*, who restates, with elaborate and detailed argumentation, the primary role of the Abbasid state seeking to produce a legal system of imperial validity and reach. The circumstances and agencies of law-making are discussed in ch. 2, the imperial code in ch. 5, and the centralisation of the judiciary at 287 ff. with an analytical list of early Abbasid judges at 296 ff. The author holds that it was Byzantine law that provided the template (detailed comparative analysis in ch. 3 and appendix 1), although he holds too mechanical a view of Byzantine influence, and seems to revert to conservative interpretations of the history of Muslim law when he comes to deal (ch. 6) with the supposed shift from state to jurists' law.

¹⁴¹ Fawzi, *Tadwin*, 58 ff. and 62 ff., for the further history of the genre; Juynboll, 'New ideas', 104.

¹⁴² GAS, 1.57 n. It is important to note that early legal literature contained only scant Qur'ānic reference, and that early exegesis, with some exceptions of not much substantive as opposed to symbolic significance, was not driven by juristic speculation: Calder, *Studies*, 219. It is also important to underline in this context the lexical discontinuity between Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*: Donner, *Narratives*, 55 ff.

a general designator of salutary, appropriate and, when necessary, binding precedent, set by the Prophet, his companions, the Caliphs or a variety of other practices,¹⁴³ into a proof-text without boundaries, and *imitatio mohameti* was to become a standard behavioural topos and paradigm for many Muslims down the centuries – which, like other such exemplary paradigms, was subject to great historical variability as to its interpretation and deployment.

This is an instance of the transfer of attributes from Caliph to the Apostle, here figuring as an impersonal topos for the expression and legitimation of legal material as well as for a whole range of other matters, including, with time, political wisdom, medicine and much else.¹⁴⁴ It is also an instance of Islamisation and the crystallisation of Paleo-Muslim possibilities and genealogies into a durable form duly recorded and become traditions, with the Islamisation of history, formal knowledge acquiring an *interpretatio islamica*.¹⁴⁵ Why the Umayyads should embark on such a path whereby their prerogatives were transferred to the Prophet, acting as a higher instance and an almost impersonal agent, and thereby a line of the transmission of charisma competing with their own, is neither obvious nor self-explanatory, although some suggestions were made above.

Whatever the possible explanation, what became the religion of Islam came to use prophetic *ḥadīth* in the manner of holy relics,¹⁴⁶ and these verbal and textual relics were later, among Sunnī Muslims, to acquire ritual and talismanic values congruent with those of the Qurʾān: a ‘synecdochic delimitation’ of prophetic doxa and exempla, read ritually at specific times, used in supplication, oaths and political rituals.¹⁴⁷ Like the persons of the Caliphs, Muḥammad and his ostensible actions and pronouncements came to have kratophanous effect.

The beginnings of this transition from exclusive and indivisible Caliphal suzerainty and the conflation of the Caliphal and Prophetic personae, to the impersonal over-arching authority of the Apostle, is particularly well reflected by pre-Reform Umayyad coins. We have seen that, following the Second Civil War and the defeat of the Kharijites, the Umayyads

¹⁴³ Ansari, ‘Juristic terminology’, 266 ff. ¹⁴⁴ See al-Azmeh, *Kingship*, 88.

¹⁴⁵ I use this term with reference to the exemplary work done on the *interpretatio christiana* of ethnography, geography and cosmography by Ingebert, *Interpretatio*.

¹⁴⁶ This description, anthropologically perceptive, was offered by Crone, *Political Thought*, 126, in a rather back-handed way and perhaps in a satirical spirit; the wealth of interpretative consequences was not drawn.

¹⁴⁷ Brown, *Canonization*, 336 ff. and ch. 9, *passim*. Al-Shāfiʿī (767–820) had already divinised the prophetic *sunna*, in a way comparable to the Rabbinic Talmud in some respects: Wegner, ‘Jurisprudence’, 50 ff., and cf. Wansbrough, *Qurʾanic Studies*, 57.

introduced formulae pronouncing Muḥammad to be Apostle of God, a statement that was to become a component of the *shahāda*, alongside references to Allāh's aid and He being the Rabb. It is salient for this argument to note that these coins, with representations of sovereigns,¹⁴⁸ are indeterminate as to the person represented, the assumption being that it was the Caliph, after Roman, Sasanian and other models. There was clearly much experimentation,¹⁴⁹ and much conceptual indeterminacy and ambivalence in the representations of the Caliphs, though they were portrayed by statues in Umayyad palaces,¹⁵⁰ and possibly elsewhere in statues and other media that have disappeared.

The juxtaposition of *Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh* with the image of the Shāhanshāh, the Sasanian King of Kings, betokens imperial rule, with reference to the Apostle as the founder of the imperial state.¹⁵¹ The image of neither the Shāhanshāh nor the basileus was a portrait of the Caliph, although it may have represented him, and one would need to interpret the use of these images as pure tokens of sovereignty, rather than as portraits. The conflation of personal and generic representation make much room for interpretation, and for the reading of these images by contemporaries. That the images were official issue, and may have been intended to represent a Caliph, could be irrelevant if one were to consider the possible multiplicity of readings, with possibilities, according to local usages, of understanding them as representing reigning Caliphs, Roman or Sasanian sovereigns on behalf of whom coins were issued originally, or Arab monarchy inaugurated by Muḥammad; one must admit the possibility that the same image might have been liable to be recycled in different readings.

Whatever the reading, some of these images convey a commonality of emblematic attributes between Caliph and Apostle. Once the Sasanian fire altar had disappeared, it was replaced by two colonettes and a high rounded arch, within which stood an upright lance terminating in an apical blade with two basal prongs bent backwards. The colonettes, with antecedents in distyle shrines or ciboria, have been interpreted as the *miḥrāb*,¹⁵² whose use was, as we have seen, being generalised, especially under al-Walīd,

¹⁴⁸ So they are generally understood, for instance Robinson, '*Abd al-Malik*', 50 f. Miles ('*Miḥrāb* and '*Anazah*', 169) considered that the removal of the Sasanian crown and its replacement by a headdress indicates that the image was meant to be a portrait. Mu'āwiya is reported by al-Balādhurī to have struck his own effigy, with a sword and whip (like 'Abd al-Malik) on a coin which went out of use, probably because of metrological insufficiency, although there may here be a confusion between Mu'āwiya and 'Abd al-Malik: Hoyland, 'Writing the biography', 15 n. 75.

¹⁴⁹ See Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge*, 28. ¹⁵⁰ For instance, Marsham, *Rituals*, 139 ff.

¹⁵¹ Heidemann, 'Evolving representation', 168, who, at 168 n. 58, compares Muḥammad in this respect to Remus and Romulus.

¹⁵² Miles, '*Miḥrāb* and '*Anazah*', 159, 161, 162, 163 n. 16.

representing not only the direction of prayer, but, earlier, the frame within which imperial images were contained. Not least important is a possible association with Muḥammad's *minbar*, and those of the Caliphs. This interpretation as a *miḥrāb* has been contested, on the assumption that there was no evidence for the existence of the *miḥrāb* then, and with a plausible preference for a generic arch acting as a sacrum enclosing the Caliph with his sword,¹⁵³ the instrument of God's will and wrath.¹⁵⁴

The lance, for its part, has been interpreted as the Apostle's stave, the *'anaza*. Like the *miḥrāb* and before it, it indicated the direction of prayer, and stood before the Apostle as he held forth, in the manner of Arab leaders and other orators, and may have had some distinctive association with military standards.¹⁵⁵ Together, these formed a system, associating the Caliph with the Apostle,¹⁵⁶ transferring the capacities and attributes of the one upon the other in a manner that needs to factor in mutuality in this relationship.

What might be concluded overall is that caution is necessary when inferring interpretations of the images of sovereigns as they occur on Umayyad coins. The Standing Caliph coin (see Figure 5) is another case in point for the ambiguity that accompanied representation, in other media and in other domains, of the Caliph and the Apostle. Genealogical representations generally start from the present in the reconstruction of the past, and this is also the case with the representation of Caliphs simultaneously as Caliphs of God and as successors to Muḥammad. The mutual transferability of attributes and capacities yields the gliding of the one personality into the other, and the typological connection between the two personae, a connection which is undergirded by a presumption of identity by means of repetition.

The Standing Caliph as a representation of Muḥammad himself has been suggested by Hoyland on a number of grounds, to which might be added that this type of Umayyad coin was roughly contemporary with the emergence of Muḥammad as a cult figure who had always had his relics hallowed. Hoyland has pointed out the contemporaneity of the title *Khalifat Allāh* with Justinian II designating himself as *Christodoulos*, and with the same *basileus* demoting himself by placing his own image on the reverse of coins showing Christ on the obverse, at a time close to the Arab triumph at Sebastopolis. In addition, given the situation following the use

¹⁵³ On which Treadwell, "Mihrab and 'Anaza'", 13 f.

¹⁵⁴ Treadwell, "Mihrab and 'Anaza'", 16 ff., 21.

¹⁵⁵ Miles, 'Miḥrāb and 'Anazah', 164 ff. ¹⁵⁶ Jamil, 'Caliph', 48 ff.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 5 Standing Caliph gold *dīnār*, AH 77.
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, HCR 4812.
Obverse: *bsm allhī lā 'lh ilā allh wḥdhl mḥmd srūl allh*
Reverse: *bsm allh/drb ḥdhā aldīnār snt 77.*

of religious formulae on coins during the Zubayrid interlude, Hoyland thought 'Abd al-Malik would have been unlikely to imitate an infidel king by putting his own image on the coin. Moreover, the iconography of the person on these coins, with flowing hair and a beard, is more like Justinian II's Christ than an emperor image. Finally, some of these coins, struck at Ḥarrān and al-Ruhā in northern Syria, mention Muḥammad only, without the name of the Caliph, and there are no precedents of coins where the obverse inscription refers to a person other than the figure portrayed.¹⁵⁷

It might also be remembered that these developments were taking place at around the time when the question of images was yet to become an issue among the Paleo-Muslims, and a quarter-century before iconoclasm was to become an issue in Constantinople.¹⁵⁸ We might also be alerted to a coin minted at Yubnā in Palestine, with the legend *Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh*, showing a standing figure with a halo.¹⁵⁹

Whatever the correct interpretation, the fact remains that the period between 693 and 697, which saw the Standing Caliph issue, marked the end of a time of transition from a seemingly boundless freedom with representing the figures of Caliph and Prophet in a mutually permeable way. The typological convertibility of the two figures remained in other media, in poetry, political writings and ceremonial. There is as yet no satisfactory explanation for the shift to aniconism (and for Muslim iconoclasm in general, for that matter).

This is one more element in the transition from Paleo-Islam to historical Islam. It was also a marker of separation from the Roman iconographic and monetary systems, with the issue of entirely epigraphic coins, coins of deliberate originality and very high levels of technical execution, with no numismatic precedents, despite visual precedents on Roman seals.¹⁶⁰ The epigraphic gold *dīnār* and silver *dirham*, with parallel stylistic histories,¹⁶¹ were to be of world-historical significance.

¹⁵⁷ Hoyland 'Writing the biography', 14 f., 21 n. 71.; Foss, 'Coinage', 758.

¹⁵⁸ Hoyland ('Writing the biography', 16) cites certain problems with images on coins but reminds us that they were nevertheless traded, even by individuals who were later to be patterned after an image of great piety. He also cites literary evidence for the existence of images of the Apostle on silk and other media.

¹⁵⁹ Heidemann, 'Evolving representation', 175–6 n. 71, who dismisses the possible implications of the Yubnā coin on grounds that it came from a provincial mint and was as a consequence unrepresentative.

¹⁶⁰ Hillenbrand, 'For God', 23 f., 26 ff.; Bates, 'History', 255 f. ¹⁶¹ Bates, 'History', 256.

Like calendars, and like currency overall, especially imperial currency with stable iconographic and metrological regimes, the coins of 'Abd al-Malik's reform served not only as tokens of independence, but as marks of hegemony and of aspirations to universal reach and pertinence.¹⁶² This needs to be added to the Arabisation of the imperial administration¹⁶³ and the requirement of conversion for senior state officials. These processes, for all their reality,¹⁶⁴ were to be incomplete and dependent upon different situations, times and places – it might be noted that conversion during this period was highly controlled, and this was only to break down in the early eighth century with the Murji'ite movement in eastern Iran and beyond. All these gathered force with time.

Just as the Umayyads had imitated Roman currency, so also did the Romans imitate Arab issue, as we saw above. Early medieval Europeans also imitated this currency; the *dīnār* which King Offa of Mercia (r. 757–796) had overstruck with the legend *Offa Rex* is a case in point.¹⁶⁵ A measure of weight in gold, an equivalent value of silver issue, a form of payment:¹⁶⁶ the gold *dīnār*, mainstay of a commercial *oecumene* centred initially upon the Arab empire, made its way outside what was to become the Muslim *oecumene* at a time of European monetary recession and socio-economic involution, aided later by the commenda arrangements that have been met with above, by *saftaja* banking arrangements, accountancy techniques deploying zero considered as a number rather than a nil, and the notion of place value.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² Examples are legion. For the imperial image on coins as a sign of sovereignty, see, for instance, Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*, 124, discussing Licinius and Constantine. For the longevity and ubiquity of coinage in the name of Alexander, see Price, *Coinage*, 1.65 f., 72 ff.

¹⁶³ This matter is little studied, as is the spread of the Arabic language overall. But it would be well to keep in mind a long-term perspective. For example, on papyrological evidence, even 'Abd al-Malik himself, in 685, condoned the continuing use of Greek on chancery documents: von Zabern, *Syrien*, 494.

¹⁶⁴ In Egypt, for instance, with adverse reactions: Sijpesteijn, 'New rule', 195 f.

¹⁶⁵ Grierson, 'Myth', 1062 f., where the author cites similar imitations in Barcelona and speaks of the circulation of Umayyad gold currency in Spain, Sicily and south Italy.

For all the contrived attempts to derive the term *mancus* from Latin and Provençal, and for all the incompleteness of the overall picture of the circulation of Arab money in Europe, there seems no compelling reason to take the name of this coin to be derived from anything but *dīnār manqūsh*: Grierson, 'Myth', 1069 f.; Duplessy, 'Circulation', 108 ff.; and the comments of Cahen, 'Quelques problèmes', 346 and Heck, *Charlemagne*, 319 f., 320 n. 6.

¹⁶⁶ Grierson, 'Mythe', 1066; Heck, *Charlemagne*, 185 ff., 319.

¹⁶⁷ Lombard, *Monnaie*, 154, 159 f., 162; Feldbauer, *Islamische Welt*, 147 ff. For all the criticism they received, Lombard's views of the circulation of Arab money seem to have been proven right in the end: Heck, *Charlemagne*, 183 f.

Just as Byzantine emperors re-enacted Roman imperialism, just as Heraclius, newly triumphant over the Sasanians, was hailed as a new Moses, Alexander and Scipio; just as Zenobia, upon conquering Egypt, put herself forward as a new Cleopatra, and as her husband Udhainat (Odenathus) declared himself Augustus, and al-Hārith (Aretas), king of Petra, declared himself to be within the ambit of Seleucid legitimacy upon occupying Damascus – so too did the Arab conquerors regard themselves as successors to all previous empires. Both the Umayyad and the Abbasid dynasties fully adopted highly elaborated discursive and ceremonial forms from the Eusebian synthesis of monotheistic religion and of empire, and the sacral-ity of the royal person, until such a time as religion detached itself as a separate sphere, from the eleventh century, ushering in the end of late antique Islam, and precipitating in the domain of socio-political and religious organisation what we might term the medieval period out of which the Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals emerged from the fifteenth century onwards, ushering in a new period again.¹⁶⁸

Throughout this development, from the inception of Paleo-Islam, developing under imperial circumstances to Islam, we have seen the interplay of the sacred and the profane, of a cultic association and an incipient polity developing into an imperial religion, acculturating the Arabs into Late Antiquity, and carrying them, and a sizeable proportion of humanity along with them, duly acculturated, into a new religion and its idiom.¹⁶⁹ Quite apart from imperial might, and long after its energies waned and its internal constitution dissipated into the byways of history, the vast economic, cultural and religious commonwealth made possible by conditions patronised by late antique empire was expedited and consolidated by a

¹⁶⁸ Al-Azmeh, *Kingship*, chs. 5–7.

¹⁶⁹ It might be noted that reference here is made not only to the acculturation into Islam, but to the acculturation of non-Muslims into the Muslim idiom. That the Syriac Old Testament *Peshitta*, according to manuscript evidence, introduced divisions into books only from the eighth century (Brock, *Bible*, 46) is worthy of historical investigation. Saʿīd b. Yūsuf al-Fayyūmī, also known as Saadiya Gaon (892–942), for instance, who translated the Torah into Arabic, used the terms *Qurʾān* and *kitāb* to denote Jewish scripture (Wegner, ‘Jurisprudence’, 33); the *Sefer ha-Qabalah* of Abraham b. David, written in Arabic in Spain in 1161, used *qabalah* as an equivalent to *ḥadīth*. For their part, Christian Arab theologians, quite apart from using Qurʾānic vocabulary from very early on (Samir, ‘Earliest’, 68, 69, 76, 108), tended to construct analogies between God’s increate *logos* and the Qurʾān during and after the controversy, under al-Muʿtaṣim and his immediate successors, over the increate nature of the Qurʾān, and otherwise inflected their theological discussions with Muslim theological terms and notions, particularly with regard to Divine Attributes (Haddad, *Trinité divine*, 115 ff., 187 ff.; al-Sharfi, *al-Fikr*, 309 and 309 n. 221. For another interpretation of the question of Divine attributes in this connection, Wolfson, ‘Muslim attributes’, 1, 11, 18).

monetary system: from dependence, to a token of independent sovereignty, Mammon, under God's signature, and God, conveyed by the imperial centre and its conveyancers of Mammon, embossed themselves upon a world of Late Antiquity, ushering through its transformations, and remaining with it to its end.

Bibliography

ABBREVIATIONS

AAE	<i>Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy</i>
AGH	al-Aṣḥabānī, <i>Kitāb al-Aghānī</i>
ALS	al-Azmeh, <i>The Arabs and Islam</i>
ARG	<i>Archiv für Religionsgeschichte</i>
ARW	<i>Archiv für Religionswissenschaft</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
CHB	<i>The Cambridge History of the Bible</i>
DDD	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i>
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
EI	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam</i> , new edition
EF	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 1st edition
EM	<i>Enzyklopädie des Märchens</i>
EQ	<i>Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān</i>
ERE	<i>Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics</i>
GAS	Sezgin, <i>Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums</i>
GQ	Nöldeke et al., <i>Geschichte des Qorāns</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
IJMES	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
JA	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
JAL	<i>Journal of Arabic Literature</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JS	Jaussen and Savignac, <i>Mission Archéologique en Arabie</i>
JSOI	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
LA	Ibn Manzūr, <i>Lisān al-ʿArab</i>
LIMC	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i>
MbS	Muqātil b. Sulaymān, <i>Tafsīr</i>
MO	<i>Manuscripta Orientalia</i>

MW	<i>The Muslim World</i> (formerly <i>The Moslem World</i>)
PSAS	<i>Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies</i>
Q	<i>al-Qur'ān al-Karīm</i> , Cairo Vulgate
RAC	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i>
RCEA	<i>Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe</i>
RES	<i>Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique</i>
RHR	<i>Revue de l'Histoire des Religions</i>
RMM	<i>Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée</i>
REMMM	<i>Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée</i>
SH	al-Ḥalabī al-Shāfi'ī, <i>al-Sīra al-Ḥalabiyya</i>
SI	<i>Studia Islamica</i>
SIH	Ibn Hishām, <i>Sīra</i>
SII	Ibn Ishāq, <i>Sīra</i>
TAB	al-Ṭabarī, <i>Tārīkh</i>
TG	van Ess, <i>Theologie und Gesellschaft</i>
US	S. Mursī al-Ṭāhir, <i>Awwal sīra fi'l-Islām. 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr</i>
WAQ	al-Wāqidī, <i>al-Maghāzī</i>
WI	<i>Die Welt des Islams</i>
WZKM	<i>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

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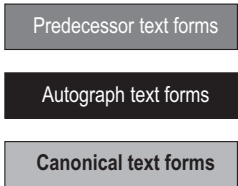
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Model for the composition of the Paleo-Muslim Qur'ān

Key

Succession in time
and textual variations
and developments

Feedback loops



1. Internal auditory and visual stimuli, Revelation: the secondary Qur'ānisation of narrative and quasi-historical lore, including Biblicisms, para- Qur'ānic materials (Khālid b. Sinān, perhaps also Umayya b. Abī al-Ṣalt), and traditional Arabian imprecations and oaths; communicative imperatives including devotional and ritual material, polemics, hortatory statements and other responses to events; enunciations of a legislative and regulative nature; confirmation of *al-muḥ addathūn* ('Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, Sa'd b. Mu'ādh, Zayd b. Ḥāritha, Muṣ'ab b. 'Umayr).
2. *Suwar*, Pericopes, *mathānī*, *muḥkamāt*, *al-ḥawāmīm* and other groups of *suwar* with Mysterious Letters.
3. All or some of the following: Ibn Mas'ūd, Mu'ādh b. Jabal, Zayd b. Thābit, 'Uthmān b. 'Affān, Mujammi' b. Jāriya, Ubayy b. Ka'b, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, Qays b. Zā'ūrā', Qays b. al-Sukn. This list may not be exhaustive.
4. Extant leaves of parchment, some with palimpsests: BNF 328, the Ṣan'ā'ī leaves, and other, more fragmentary remains that have been catalogued and/or studied so far.
5. *Suḥuf/maṣāḥif* reported by St John of Damascus and the Monk of Beth Hale; *Suḥuf/maṣāḥif* reported at al-Yamāma, Ḥunayn and Ṣiffīn.
6. For instance, the contraction of *sūrat al-aḥzāb* from some 200 to 33 verses, and 'Umar's report on lapidation.
7. For instance, Khuzayma b. Thābit on Q, 9.128–9.

